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SPEAKING OF ELLEN.

BY ALBERT ROSS,

AUTHOR OF

"THOU SHALT NOT," "HIS PRIVATE CHARACTER,"
"IN STELLA'S SHADOW," "WHY I'M SINGLE,"
"HER HUSBAND'S FRIEND," ETC.

"But where is our great mother, the State!" she cried, throwing back her head with a superb motion. "The State, which claims our allegiance, which seizes our substance for its revenues, which drafts our brothers into its armies, which punishes our treason even with death! Every child that is born adds to its strength and glory! We who make the State, how long shall we appeal to it in vain!"—Page 22.

NEW YORK:

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UTORA
RBR
PZ465

TO MY READERS.

Novels have grown to be almost as necessary to civilized man as food or raiment. Thousands of able pens are endeavoring, with greater or less success, to meet this demand. But to my mind the ideal work of fiction can have but one of three excuses for being: It will either combat some evil, inculcate some lesson, or discuss some great issue.

"Thou Shalt Not" has been called "an argument in narrative form." It is, indeed, an argument, and its premises cannot be successfully assailed. "His Private Character" arraigns the mercenary marriage and that kind of Notoriety that is seeking to replace Merit on the modern stage. The phenomenal sale of these books prove that they have struck the popular vein, but there are still other living issues to be met.

A few months ago I was led into a prison, in which groans and curses mingled strangely with sobs and supplications. I found aged men, weary women and sad-eyed children, with no means of escape. When I de-

manded to know the reason, I was answered flippantly that these things always had been and always would be.

As I stood there, lost in pity for the unfortunates, a sudden gleam shot across the darkness. A ray of the blessed sun penetrated the noisome depths. The confined ones struggled to their feet and took deep breaths of joy! A heroic soul had scaled the outer wall and forced aside a heavy stone. I did not see the man, but some one said his name was BELLAMY!

I could not have made that bold ascent, but by the new light I saw many things. I learned that the prison had doors whose bolts, though rusted in their sockets, were not immovable. I realized also, for the first time, the utter woe that the darkness had concealed.

"Speaking of Ellen" tells a little of what I saw and much of what I hope. The world now knows its Crime. It can no longer skulk behind the plea of ignorance. Those iron doors must come down if we would save ourselves and our posterity.

ALBERT ROSS.

Address:
No. 33 West 23d Street, New York.

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SPEAKING OF ELLEN

CHAPTER I.

THE MARCHIONESS OF RIVERFALL.

"Speaking of Ellen—"

"Yes?"

"How came she to be called the 'Marchioness of Riverfall?'"

The young man to whom the question was addressed, paused a moment.

"Local history does not record the origin of the title," he said, when he was ready to reply.

"What do you *think* was the reason?"

"Her manner, I should say, for I doubt if you ever saw anything more stately. Though why 'Marchioness,' instead of 'Duchess' or 'QUEEN,' I do not understand. She might be the EMPRESS of Riverfall, if one were to judge by her gait and manner."

"You did not mention her surname, I believe."

"She has none; no, and she is rather proud of the fact. Her mother was an English girl, who used to work in the mills here, the same as Ellen does now. Her father is said to have been a United States senator."

PAGINATION INCORRECT

"Then Ellen is—"

"What the law calls illegitimate?—yes."

Philip Westland noticed a peculiar inflection in the tone in which his companion uttered these words, as well as something strange in the words themselves.

"What the *law* calls," he repeated. "And what does Hugh Mayfield call it?"

"Love-born."

Philip Westland laughed lightly.

"Perhaps the United States senator deserves no such compliment," he said. "He is quite likely to have been a cold-hearted villain, without redeeming qualities."

"Very true," said Mayfield, "but my reference was wholly to the mother. The father's part in a child is usually selfish; the mother's nearly always sublime. The unfortunate mill-girl must have loved the senator, and her child deserves no epithet that carries with it a sting."

Westland looked thoughtful.

"Ellen could have taken his name, though," he said. "I have known of such cases."

"She would not honor him so highly," was the positive rejoinder.

"Ah! She lacks the filial sense, does she?"

"On that side, naturally. Her father never acknowledged her, and even repudiated her mother, when informed of her condition. He was not a senator then, but the handsome son of a rich father, and just beginning to rise in politics. The story of his liason, had it become known to the world, might have injured him. He could have provided for her in a quiet way, but she would have been a constant menace. The easiest thing was to abandon her, and he did it."

A bitter feeling was evident in the sharp, cutting tones

of the speaker, for which his companion could find no warrant in the circumstances of the case, as he understood them.

"You speak warmly, Hugh," he said. "What interests you so deeply in the Marchioness of Riverfall?"

"She is my sister," was the unexpected reply.

"Your sister!"

"Yes; and yours."

Westland looked relieved.

"Oh, in the broad sense, eh? A daughter of our mother Eve. Well, she is a credit to her lineage, in looks, at least, if all accounts are true. I would like to know her better."

Hugh glanced inquiringly at the speaker's face. Its owner evidently belonged to what is called in some circles the "upper classes." The features upon which Hugh gazed were those of a man who considered himself born to rule. Westland's air, while perfectly good-natured, was undoubtedly aristocratic. Mayfield, on the contrary, though dressed becomingly in his best suit, could not have disguised the fact that he was a "working-man." Nobody would have mistaken him for a "gentleman," as that word is so often misapplied. His hands were hard and rough. All of his garments together could not have cost as much as the chain and seals which were attached to Westland's gold watch.

Everybody in Riverfall knew Hugh. The employes of the Great Central Corporation, that gigantic concern which owned all of the mills, as well as the larger part of the other real estate in Riverfall, looked up to him as to a friend upon whose intelligence and sympathy they could always rely. But Mr. Ezra Baker, the mill agent, who could find no fault with his work, suspected him of

holding incendiary views on the relations between Capital and Labor.

"If there is ever another strike here," Agent Baker had remarked more than once, to various directors, "I shall keep my eye on that young Mayfield."

Philip Westland had reached the age of thirty years, making him some six years the elder of the young "mill-hand" with whom he was walking the streets of Riverfall on the morning when he is introduced to the reader. His usual abiding place was in the city of New York, where, in an office on lower Broadway, he was supposed to attend to the management of the estates of minors and others—a business which had descended to him by natural process from his deceased father. Among the property which he had in charge was considerable stock in the Great Central Corporation, as well as sundry houses and lands adjacent. His acquaintance with Mayfield was at first accidental, but time had cemented it into a friendship which apparently bade fair to be lasting. Westland liked to talk with Hugh. He had a taste for controversy, and delighted in argument, so long as it was conducted on an agreeable basis. Mayfield cultivated his acquaintance largely because he thought him arable ground for the labor reform seed which he was so fond of sowing. One was an aristocrat up to a certain line, though courteous to a degree in his intercourse with those whom he esteemed beneath him in a social way. The other, while deeming himself the equal of any man who walked the footstool of God, was proud to be a Man of the People, and had no desire to rise above his condition, unless he could lift his fellows at the same time.

"Why do you wish to know Ellen?" he asked. "You would find her haughty, and very likely you would call

her impolite. She has little love for men in your station. To her a gentleman of wealth is nothing more or less than a robber who has plundered his goods from those more ignorant or weaker than himself."

Westland broke off a branch from an apple-tree which hung over the road, and began to chew the white and red blossoms.

"Waiving for the moment the point that I am not a 'gentleman of wealth,' but a hard-working man of business, Ellen's opinions must be about the same as your own, Hugh. I have been told so often during the past year that I am the agent of organized thievery that I can surely endure to hear it once more, even from feminine lips."

"You would find it quite different, though," said Mayfield. "I talk to you in the ordinary, colloquial way. Ellen would be apt to say unpalatable things, when she found how strongly you oppose her views."

Westland laughed.

"Perhaps I should not oppose them," said he. "I have learned a few things since I dropped to this planet, and one of them is never to dispute a woman. If Ellen were to 'accuse me of such things it were better my mother had not borne me,' as Hamlet remarks, I would hear her meekly. No, Hugh, have no fear on that score."

They turned a corner and walked on, further out of the village limits, toward the country.

"You could not help it," said Hugh, after a brief interval. "No, you could not. Ellen would say what would compel you to reply."

"For instance—"

"Oh, it is too much to expect me to imagine a conversation between two such people as Ellen and you

Both are well equipped for an argument, but were you to enter into one, you would be sure to come off second best. You had better not try it."

Westland had eaten the apple-blossoms, and was now biting the stick.

"But I shall, Hugh," he said, decidedly. "My curiosity is aroused. I must have an interview with the senator's daughter—that is, if she will accord me one. I shall ask you to introduce me, but I shall hope to arrange my talk with her when there will be no witnesses to my discomfiture."

The "mill-hand" looked rather uneasy.

"You won't take a frivolous vein, I hope," he said. "Ellen is quick to notice. Don't assume an air of patronage. You would be sure to suffer for it."

"Have no fear," replied Westland. "I shall act as if she were in every sense my equal."

"But she considers herself vastly your superior," was the unexpected rejoinder.

Philip Westland took the apple-twig from his mouth and wiped his lips with a white silk handkerchief.

"Indeed!" he ejaculated.

"I might as well prepare you," continued Mayfield, "if you are to insist on talking with her. Ellen is gentleness itself in her dealings with what she calls her 'own people.' When she meets one of your class—Agent Baker, for example—it takes very little to bring her disdain to the surface. I have seen him paying her off on a Saturday night when her pose and expression would have made her an excellent model for a statue of Contempt."

Westland returned the handkerchief to his pocket, remarking, laconically—

"But she took the money."

"Yes. And as she swept the pittance into her purse one could read in her countenance, as in illumined print, 'They have kept back the lion's share, these thieves! and deserve the execration that belongs to all their ilk!'"

Then the New Yorker said, quietly:

"Agent Baker must be an affable man to endure that sort of thing. Not at all the heartless fellow he has been represented."

"Endure it!" cried Mayfield. "What else can he do? Were he to discharge Ellen, not a spindle in his mills would revolve till she was reinstated. Agent Baker is clothed with great powers; he can do many arbitrary things; but he knows better than to raise a personal issue with the Marchioness of Riverfall!"

Westland had plucked a second apple-branch, and engaged in another attempt to masticate the blossoms upon it.

"Are you sure you are not overstating the case?" he said.

"Perfectly sure. The spinners and weavers of Riverfall have suffered cut-downs before now — sometimes after a fight, and sometimes without one. They have borne increased hardness of rule. The greed of Capital, of which Agent Baker is the exponent, may grind them lower yet, for all I know, though I doubt it. But put his two thousand employes face to face with the simple question of standing by Ellen and not one of them would budge. Ezra Baker is a bold man, but he will never try that."

Then the New Yorker, without changing his tone or expression in the slightest degree, said:

"Hugh, if I were the agent of the Great Central Corporation, and Ellen treated me in that manner, I would

discharge her on the spot. I should consider it necessary."

"And the result would be what I have predicted," said Mayfield, grimly.

Westland spat out the apple-buds he had been chewing.

"A nice state of affairs you open to me, in an alleged free country! A man compelled, whether he will or no, to employ a certain person in his mill under penalty of having his entire establishment closed! Why, there is no greater tyranny in Russia! Our fathers fought Great Britain for less. If I were proprietor of the Great Central mills—I won't say agent, for the directors might not endorse my action—I would see moss cover its walls, its water-wheels go to decay and its machinery rust beyond repair, before I would let any man, woman or child in my employ dictate to me how to manage my own business."

Mayfield preserved a courtesy of demeanor equal to that of his companion. They had often had talks on the labor problem, and each knew quite well what to expect from the other.

"Your statement brings up a hundred things," said the "mill-hand," "the principal one being whether the running of a set of mills in which two thousand persons are employed is the 'own business' of one man. I have an idea that it is the business of every person who works there. If the owner, for a fancied injury, deprives one of them of the privilege of earning his bread, the others do well to resist, for the general welfare."

Westland bowed assent.

"They have a right to do anything they can accomplish, and I have a similar right, if they are my employes. In the case you cite they might leave the mills, and stay

out till the surface of Hades became congealed, but they never could force me to employ a person I did not want. No, even if it took my last dollar!"

Mayfield smiled.

"You would do well not to advance such doctrines in your coming interview with Ellen—that is, if you still think of having one."

"Why—is she dangerous?"

"In argument—yes. She will get the best of you unless you adopt broader ground than your attitude suggests. You are on controversial soil that is only the alphabet to her."

"And the burden of her song will be the oppression of the honest laborer by the bloated capitalist," said Westland. "Well, I am ready to meet her. I remember that the bloated laborer knocked the honest capitalist out of a year's dividend, not so long ago, in this very town, and I know of more than one family that was greatly inconvenienced by the loss of income that ensued."

As the friends had now walked a good mile beyond the village limits, they began slowly to retrace their steps.

"What was the source of the income of which you speak?" asked Hugh, presently.

"Mill stocks, left by husbands and fathers."

"Where did the husbands and fathers get those stocks?"

"Where? Bought them, of course."

"Of whom?"

"People who had them to sell."

"But where did the original owners get them?" persisted Hugh doggedly.

Westland looked at his companion. He thought he was trying to perpetrate a joke at his expense.

"I only want to prepare you a little for what you may expect at Ellen's," said Hugh. "She will take you back to first principles. You see, if I find you in possession of a piece of real estate that my great-grand-uncle willed to my great-grandfather, and of which he was never legally dispossessed, I can oust you and get possession, no matter how many false deeds lie between your claim and mine. I therefore wish to know how honestly these stocks became those of your unfortunate widows and orphans. If the principle is a just one, why not apply it to both cases? Ellen would probably ask you that."

Nothing in this statement seemed in the least to disturb the gentleman to whom it was addressed. He strolled along, with his hands clasped behind him, his straw hat tipped back a little from his intellectual forehead, evidently at peace with all the world.

"I should say to Ellen—as I say to you," he replied, "that the laws of this Commonwealth and of the State of New York are a sufficient answer to the question. The ownership of those shares is as well settled as that of the petticoats and bonnets she professes to call hers."

"But the law cannot fix their *value*," interrupted Mayfield, "which is the important point, after all."

A new idea had evidently been conveyed to the capitalist.

"Their value," Hugh proceeded, "depends on their ability to earn—I use the cant phrase of business—it is not the correct one—dividends. A stock that ceases to be productive—another erroneous expression, but the usual one—ceases to have real value. The employes of the Great Central Corporation can destroy your dividends any year they please. Does not this teach you

that the running of a mill is not altogether the business of its alleged owners, but of the people who do its work, as well?"

As the New Yorker listened, a quiet smile came over his face.

"I have left some things in my home," he said. "During my absence some one may have entered and taken the most valuable of them. This should teach me the folly of locks and bolts. Yes, I understand."

"If you had taken the things in the first place from the person who has entered your house, the case would seem nearer a parallel. But then, according to law, he would not need to break in. He could get a sheriff and a writ of replevin."

Westland laughed aloud.

"That's ingenious, upon my word!" he exclaimed. "But really, Hugh, you forget one important thing. The employes of a mill agree to work for a stipulated wage, and accept it on pay-day as compensation for the services they have rendered. What, in law or reason, gives them a right in that other great factor in the production of goods, called Capital? If they don't want the work at the rates offered, why do they apply for places? There are always plenty who do. I tell you the American workingman would be better off to-day if all the Agitators and Theorists were shipped to Africa."

"Tell that to Ellen," laughed Mayfield, "and she will answer you. I have gone much further with this discussion than I purposed when we began, and I fear I shall cover some of her ground. I am glad, on the whole, that you are going to talk with her, for with your imperturbable good nature no harm can result. When would you like to meet her?"

Westland thought a moment.

"The sooner the better. Why not to-day? As it is Sunday she will have more time than during the week, and so shall I. Besides, I am liable to return to the city to-morrow. She won't object to talking on Sunday, I suppose?"

"Why should she?" was the brief response.

The slow walk which the friends assumed brought them, fifteen minutes later, within the precincts of the manufacturing village, and shortly afterward they ascended the rough stairway of one of the corporation houses. Anyone who has ever visited a New England mill town need not be told that in most of them the employes' houses are square edifices of a uniformly unattractive appearance, surrounded by neither fence nor lawn. Sometimes they are of unfaced brick, sometimes of wood that is painted, if at all, in colors selected with an eye to wear rather than beauty. Places to cook and sleep in they undoubtedly are, but who could apply to them that bright English word "home?" The rents received from these tenements are often sufficient to pay their entire cost every four or five years. In such a building, on the third floor, were the two rooms occupied by the Marchioness of Riverfall, and Philip Westland owned to an uneasy feeling as he stood with Mayfield at her door, and heard the resounding knock on the pine panel.

Westland had never seen the Marchioness, though his visits to Riverfall had been quite frequent during the past year, and his preconceived notions hardly prepared him for the reality, when the "mill-girl" opened the door and Mayfield presented him in the usual manner. He saw a beautiful young woman, a little above the average height; with dark and most expressive eyes, that looked anything but dangerous; heavy black hair, evidently of

unusual length, becomingly arranged upon a finely, shaped head; a complexion fresh as the apple-blossoms he had picked that morning; slender hands (this he noticed instantly) that might have been elegant but for the effect of mill work; a plain cambric dress, with linen collar and cuffs and, more noticeable than all the rest, a stateliness of carriage that seemed to the city gentleman strangely out of keeping with her station and surroundings.

"Ellen," said Hugh, after exchanging greetings, "I have brought my friend Westland to you at his own request. He is a thorough representative of our enemies the Capitalists, and I want you to convert him."

A cloud passed over Ellen's face as she listened. She motioned her callers to seats, but herself remained standing.

"I am hardly in a condition to talk to any one to-day, Hugh," she said, and Westland noticed that her voice was quite as charming as her countenance. "Mr. Baker has hired three more children for the mill—little ones who ought to be kept at school. He seems to care nothing for the law, and I do not know why he should, as no official ever interferes with him. The parents of these children are French Canadians and they want their wages. I saw them yesterday. The youngest is nine and the eldest thirteen. Poor little things! Too young to begin a life like ours—is it not, sir—a life they will probably renounce only for the grave!"

She had appealed to Westland, and he found himself drawn into argument sooner than he anticipated.

"If the parents of these children really need their wages for their support—as I understand from your statement—what remedy would you suggest?" he asked "Hunger must be satisfied."

The dark eyes dilated, and the handsome mouth grew firmer.

"Do you contend, sir, that it is an equitable rate of wages which refuses a parent enough to provide his children with the bare necessaries of life without putting them into the mill before they reach their teens?"

Westland was not at all abashed.

"How many children has this Canadian?" he asked. "Probably a dozen. Allowing that to be true, would the mill-agent be justified on that account in paying him proportionate wages as compared with other men who have three children or none?"

Ellen listened with an expression in which pity seemed uppermost. He saw now better than before why the people had given her a title. Court robes or jewels were not required to enforce her claim. Nobility shone in every look and action.

"But where is our great mother, the *State!*" she cried, throwing back her head with a superb motion. "The *State*, which claims our allegiance, which seizes our substance for its revenues, which drafts our brothers into its armies, which punishes our treason even with death! Every child that is born adds to its strength and glory! Shall the State, then, demand our all and give us back nothing? Agent Baker is but a man—a man limited in his powers by the greedy capitalists who employ him. But the State is a god! It has the power to protect its children. It cannot afford to let them be stunted in their infantile years. We who make the State, how long shall we appeal to it in vain?"

Westland was much impressed by the beauty and eloquence of the speaker, but the words themselves touched no responsive chord. When she had finished he said:

"I shall be glad to discuss this entire question with you whenever you can spare sufficient time. I should like to go to the bottom of the subject. Neither of us might be able to convince the other, but both could hardly fail to gain new ideas."

"Mr. Westland is disposed to do right," put in Hugh, "but he can only be persuaded through his reason. I have talked to him considerably, I admit, without much effect, but I think you could succeed better. In fact, when you have done with him, I shall quite expect to see him enroll himself in our ranks."

Westland smiled at the statement.

"While I wish very much to talk with you," he said to Ellen, "I do not encourage any such hope as that suggested by my friend. I am so sure of my premises that conversion seems impossible. In fact, I am not at all certain I shall not make a proselyte of *you*."

At this Ellen smiled also.

"I will see you this evening," she said. "My sick patients will take most of my time until then. There are always several persons who have broken down under the mill work, whom I take to some extent under my charge. They would be much disappointed were I to omit my Sunday calls. If you will come to-night, say at seven, I shall be glad to see you."

Westland agreed to the hour and, a few minutes later, took his leave with Hugh.

"What a beauty!" he exclaimed, as soon as they were out of hearing. "She would adorn a palace! I never saw such a queenly air! But I suppose she would not give up her position as Marchioness of Riverfall for a Fifth avenue mansion. A strange eccentricity! She seems so self-sufficient, too."

He paused and then added:

"She will probably work on in these mills till she grows old and faded, with never a husband or child to adore her. Don't you think so?"

"I don't know; you might ask her," was Hugh's rather peculiar reply.

CHAPTER II.

A MAN OF BUSINESS.

The day after the conversation just related Philip Westland rang the bell of a residence on Lexington avenue, New York city, as the sun was setting. The servant who responded admitted him without ceremony, and allowed him to proceed to a room on the second floor, where he knocked gently at the door. The rustle of a woman's dress was instantly heard, and a moment later he had entered and stood in the presence of a fine-looking lady, perhaps twenty-one years of age, who was attired in deep black.

"I heard you on the steps, even before you rang," she said, joy beaming from her pale face. "How glad I am that you are here!"

He looked a little annoyed, but gave the lady a slight embrace and touched his lips lightly to hers. She could not see the expression of his features, for she was blind; but she felt, with the instinctive knowledge of those thus deprived, that he was not as happy as usual.

"Philip," she said, gently, "what is the matter? Come and sit by me on the sofa and tell me all your troubles."

"I have none," he answered, forcing a laugh, as he accompanied her to the place designated. "Have I not told you often that trouble and I were never made acquainted with each other? I wish you could say the same, Edna."

"When you are with me it almost seems as if I could," was her earnest reply. "It is only when you are away that the time drags slowly. Do you realize that you have been out of town four days?"

Westland took up the hand she placed in his and patted it absently.

"Four days!" he repeated. "I did not think it was so long." Then he added, more, apparently, to divert her attention than for any other reason, "play me something."

She sprang up brightly and took a violin from an adjacent table. There was no sign in her movements of her great misfortune. She placed her hand as confidently upon the instrument as if her sight was perfect. The blind learn to remember and to judge distances more accurately than those who see. The manner in which she held the violin and the way she drew the bow across it showed her love for the task. Music floated out upon the atmosphere of the room, filling it with low, sweet sounds. Edna Melbourg was a thorough mistress of an accomplishment too rare among American ladies, and Westland found himself under the spell of the harmony before he was aware of it. He lay back and dreamily watched the striking face that bent lovingly over the violin, and the long, slender fingers, plentifully adorned with plain and mourning rings, that plied the bow. The loose sleeves which the lady wore revealed some space of forearm, where the delicate white flesh

with its environment of lace appealed to his sense of refinement.

"Do you know what that is?" she asked, pausing in her playing.

"No," he said, with a slight start. "You had soothed me into such a deep reverie, I did not notice when you ceased to play."

"It is called 'Love in Italy.' Philip, when are you going to take me there?"

He drew his hand across his forehead and said, absently—

"Oh, sometime."

She came and sat by his side again, upon the sofa.

"It will be full of wonderful things—that sometime of yours. I have always wanted to be in Italy. I can scent in imagination its balmy air. I can hear the glad notes of its song-birds. I can imagine the gondolas, gliding through the water with the easy motion of swans. I can feel the delicious breezes of the Adriatic and the Mediterranean fanning my cheek. All these I have dreamed of, and sometime—yes, sometime—you and I will experience them together!"

It was the last word in her rhapsody that made Westland shrug his shoulders, though the movement was so slight as to be imperceptible even to Miss Melbourg's quick senses.

"You must not forget," he said, "that were we together in Italy we should be farther apart than we are here in New York. I can visit you in this house, and the plea of business answers for everything. This is your home. In Italy we should be Philip Westland and Edna Melbourg, traveling acquaintances. I am not enough older than you to pass as your guardian and it would take little to attract attention. The female Cerberus you

would be obliged to take along would deprive us of solitude, even in the handy compartment railway carriages She would not recognize your ingenious claim that you are still that little child who used to climb on my knee and ask for bon-bons, though you and I have never noticed the difference. Why, I could not sit by you on a sofa like this, anywhere in the length and breadth of Humbert's dominions."

She bore a triumphant look as he finished—the look of one who feels herself competent to surmount every difficulty.

"Leave that to me," she smiled. "There are apartments that can be hired in every city of Italy as well as here. There are Italian waiting-maids who speak no English, and understand no more than one wishes them to. There are secluded villas in the interior, among the vineyards, where we can go. Italy has its mountains, but none so high that resolution cannot surmount them. No, Philip, I have not been listening to the reading of every book on Italy that I could buy during the past two years for nothing. In that case yonder you will find all the Italian lore you could need in a lifetime."

Much of the weary look disappeared from his face before the radiance of her expression.

"But," he said, "I am well known and should almost certainly meet Americans wherever I went. It would not be agreeable to be detected in surreptitious practices, which would surely be misconstrued. You would learn before you had been abroad a month that the world is a very little place, and that—compared with it—New York is a very large one."

She leaned toward him and placed one arm about his neck.

"I wish I could see your face and tell how much in

earnest you are," she said. "Supposing some meddler did discover us, would you care very, very much?"

He drew back and gazed into her eager face.

"Would *I* care? Would *you* care, you mean! I think you sometimes forget the limitations of your sex, Edna. How would you like to be the subject of gossip at tables d'hôtes? How would you like to hear that people said—"

She put a finger upon his lips.

"If I was innocent—"

"How would the world know that?"

"My misfortune should stand my sponsor," she answered, soberly.

With a gentle motion he took her arm from his neck.

"People are judged by appearances," he said. "Not a man or woman who knows us could enter this room at this moment and hold us blameless. I am an avowed celibate and your father's will stands in the way of your marrying. What follows? Platonic affection? These are not the symptoms. Clasping arms about one, holding his hands, kissing his lips—these are not platonic tokens. Imagine a journey to Italy added, with an element of secrecy thrown in, and it would convince even the Grand Jury."

If he had intended to bring a cloud into the blind lady's face he had succeeded well. Her expression was touching in its sadness.

"It is true," she said, "that my father's will provides that I shall lose his property if I marry. He thought he did wisely in making that provision, as he feared I might become the victim of some adventurer, who only sought my money. His wish would be sufficient to influence me, even had he made it known less emphatically. But—" and here a deep blush suffused the pale cheeks—

"he has not forbidden me to *love*. If he had, I might find compliance harder."

Well was it for Edna Melbourg's peace of mind that she could not see Philip Westland's face as she uttered these words. It contained a mixture of sympathy, repugnance and regret that was not pleasant to contemplate. He took out his watch and glanced at the hour.

"Now, don't do that," said Edna, pleadingly. "You have been away four long days, and this evening belongs wholly to me. Talk to me, Philip. I never knew you so taciturn. What did you find at Riverfall to put you into this mood ?"

He looked at her a moment.

"There is a young woman there—"

"You love her !" she cried, piteously.

"No," he replied, without changing his tone. "I should be more inclined to hate her, if I ever hated anybody. She puzzles me. I had a long talk with her last night—in her room."

"In her room !" cried Edna, again. "Oh, Philip !"

"Yes, in her room !" repeated Westland, in a louder voice. "Where else ? Good God, Edna ! You are not jealous, as well as you know me ! There is no situation conceivable in which you should fear for me. Don't interject such insinuations, I beg !"

The slender hands were clasped for a moment over the lady's sightless eyes.

"Sometimes I think I am growing insane. I cannot bear to think you ever *looked* at a woman ! Well, go on."

He composed himself by a brief pause and then proceeded :

"The Marchioness—"

"A titled lady—"

"It is only a local appellation, on account of her high

and mighty bearing. Ellen is her real name. She talked to me as no one ever talked before. She is a child of the people—the lower strata—on the maternal side, but her father was a United States senator. Her mother was never married."

Miss Melbourg drew a little away, as if from fear of contamination from one so recently in such company.

"A strange companion for Philip Westland," she said, coldly.

"Admitted," was his equally cool reply. "But, as I said, I went to her room and talked with her. Yes, from seven o'clock till after midnight—and I am going again."

Miss Melbourg's forehead bore something very like a frown at this announcement.

"Do you say this to annoy me?" she demanded.

"I state it because it is the truth. We played a game for five hours—a game in which I have always believed myself somewhat proficient—and she came out ahead. I am not the man to give up easily, and I am going back to Riverfall and try again."

The blind lady put both her hands on his arms and held him as if she would read his face with her sightless orbs.

"Philip, what do you mean?"

"She told me I was the agent of a band of robbers—"

"Told *you!*—"

"Yes, and nearly made me believe it. She accused me of being accessory to more than one murder—"

"Oh, Philip!"

"And I could almost see the blood-stains on my garments. She told me I stole from the poor and gave to the rich, retaining my commission out of the dishonest

transaction And, as I live, Edna, I seemed as she spoke to hear the rattle of the base coin in my pockets !"

Miss Melbourg looked much distressed.

"She is a mesmerist, Philip. Promise me not to go there again."

"I must go," he said, thoughtfully. "She is no mesmerist. She uses no power but that of argument. I shall study the question well before I return, for I do not believe she is right. She cannot be. There must be a fallacy somewhere in her theories, and I shall discover it."

"You talk in riddles," said Edna.

"Oh, it is the labor question, that I have heard argued from my infancy. But Ellen goes deeper into it than any person I ever heard or read. She succeeded in making me appear contemptible, though I refused to admit a single one of her claims."

Feminine instinct dictated the next question:

"What is she like? Describe her."

Westland attempted to comply, but like most men could give little beside generalities. Ellen was grand, magnificent, queenly. He could not tell the color of her hair or eyes, nor guess at her height or weight.

"She was dressed in the commonest clothing," he said. "Her gown was one of those prints that sell at ten cents a yard, and this was on Sunday, you must remember. Her room was very bare of furniture, but there were birds, and many flowers, and a few books and pictures. Fifteen or twenty dollars would buy everything there, I should say."

"Her voice—masculine and harsh, I suppose?"

"On the contrary, it is very winning and gentle."

"Philip," said the blind girl, "you are in love with this 'Marchioness.' You will deny it, and you are honest

in your denial, but I know it is true. I know the time must come when I shall lose you, but I should hope to resign you to other arms than those of an illegitimate mill-girl!"

The lady had no sooner uttered these words than she regretted them. She feared their effect would be to arouse antagonism in the mind she was trying to persuade. Abuse is seldom a potential weapon. But Westland only said:

"Legitimacy is a relative term, Edna."

"But, are you sure you are not in love with her? Search your heart before you answer."

He waited a reasonable time, during which the searching process was supposed to be progressing.

"After a careful survey of my most vital organ," he said, "I find there no love for Ellen—nor for any other living woman." Then, seeing that he had hurt her, he added, "There are women whom I esteem highly, there is at least one toward whom I entertain sentiments of affection; but I never was, never can be, in love. I have told you that so often, I should think you could never doubt it."

A passive expression settled upon the lady's face and she made no reply.

Soon he continued:

"I am a man of business. I have no time for love. Rents must be collected, estates settled, dividends looked after. There is another big strike brewing at Riverfall. If it lasts long it will entail a heavy loss to some of my clients—yourself among the number. Agent Baker is not the man to deal with those spinners and weavers, and besides, he wishes to resign. Some of the directors have asked me to allow myself to be elected in his place. If I accept, there will be something more important

than love affairs to claim my attention for the next year."

The sad look deepened on the face of the blind lady.

"That would effectually dispose of our Italian journey."

He knit his brows at the unexpected recurrence to that subject.

"Would you be willing," he asked, "to lose your investments in Riverfall in order to get a few months in Italy?"

"With you—yes. I have enough other income, and I have wanted to go so long! My blindness makes me only a child, Philip, and I am easily disappointed."

He knew it full well, but he said she could enjoy much if she went alone.

"A good female courier would answer every purpose—"

"No!" she exclaimed. "I will not go without you! How could I pass months beyond the sound of your voice, beyond the touch of your hand! If we cannot go together we will remain here."

She threw herself into his arms, which opened to receive her. Though far from feeling sentiments similar to those which animated his companion, Westland was touched by her tenderness. The scene was one which they rehearsed frequently. As she lay with her face against his, he could feel the quick pulsations of her heart against his breast. His sympathies were enlisted, but no warmer sentiment was developed. It was his boast that no woman had ever affected him, and he believed none ever could. She drew his face closer.

"Kiss me, Philip!"

He permitted her to bring his lips into contact with hers, which met them half way. The traveler across the great African desert does not quench his thirst at

the first oasian spring with greater avidity than Edna quenched her thirst for love in Philip's breath. He marked the movement of her heart, beating faster and faster; the spasmodic twitches of he closed eyelids, the coming and going of the little patches of color in her face. The experience interested him as a physical study, but it did nothing more. He would have liked to time his own arteries, and would have been willing to wager a goodly sum that they made not one pulsation more or less than usual. When upward of a minute had elapsed, he disengaged his lips to say:

"Isn't that enough, Edna? It seems to me you have exceeded your ordinary allowance."

Her color was heightened by his observation, but her only reply was to drink deeper draughts than before.

"How long would you make your kisses last, I wonder?" he asked, when the lovely burden he held lay back from sheer exhaustion. "How long would you continue them, if you had your full liberty?"

"Till morning!" she cried. "And then till noon! And then till night again! And then till another morning!"

Her rhapsodaical mood made him laugh lightly.

"You greedy child!" he exclaimed. "There is but one way to content you—you should be married. A honeymoon with a man as warm-hearted as yourself would probably kill you, but you would die happy."

She answered him with another kiss, less passionate and more thoughtful than those which preceded it.

"You know I cannot marry without forfeiting my property," she said, "and besides I love no one but you How could I marry anyone else?"

He smiled at the avowal to which he was so well customed

"Some French poet has said that the flagon is immaterial so long as the wine is good. In a week after marriage you would find your love transferred as clearly as though you used the decalcomanie process. Now I am going to make a suggestion. I know where you can get a husband, young, handsome, and fairly bubbling over with affection—and still not lose a penny of your fortune."

This statement was sufficiently remarkable to cause the blind lady to raise herself to a sitting posture and pass her hand over Philip Westland's face. It was her way of ascertaining how much he was in earnest. Satisfied after this inspection that he meant what he said, she relapsed into deep meditation, but could not solve the riddle.

"Philip," she said, looking up, "whom do you mean?"

"Ralph."

"Bah! He is only a boy!"

"He is man enough for you," laughed Westland, "and certainly a year older. Ralph is now twenty-two. Your father's will provides that your property shall go to him if you marry. If he had determined that you two should wed he could not have worded the instrument more adroitly. Who knows but that was his intention?"

Edna relapsed again into silence.

"No, I never could love Ralph," she said, after a long time. "I never could love any one, Philip, but you."

"Nonsense!" he cried. "Love is like dining: one may prefer consommé, but he can eat mock turtle. We must take whatever is on the bill of fare. Ralph would suit you—he is all fire. Your night-till-morning, morning-till-night scheme would suit him admirably. He is not your first cousin, you know, but only of the sixteenth or thirty-second variety. Nothing could be

wiser. It would also be a great relief to me. I am trustee for you both, and I should be able to get along with one set of accounts instead of two."

Edna rose with dignity.

"You are not compelled to come here, if you find it so tiresome," she said, in a faltering voice.

He rose also and placed an arm about her.

"There! When we reach this stage I always know it is near the hour for my departure."

She put both arms about his neck and hid her face on his shoulder.

"Yes, there is only one thing left," he said, "the kiss-and-make-up. We have timed our proceedings with the utmost regularity. I think we have not varied the usual programme in any essential detail."

She suffered him to lead her to a large arm-chair, and sank into his embrace.

"When will you come again?" she asked.

"I don't know. I must return to Riverfall in the morning."

"What do those terrible mill-workers want now?"

"'Food and clothing,' Ellen says. 'A fairer share of what they earn.'"

Edna made an impatient movement.

"They had it *all* last year. The Great Central Corporation could not pay its dividend. I suppose they would like to have us assessed for their benefit. What ails such people? They never used to act so."

"That is what I mean to find out," said Westland, reflectively. "That is why I spent five hours with Ellen last night. That is why I am going back to Riverfall to-morrow. If I am to take the agency, I wish to know the situation a little better."

"Then I must give up Italy for the present," said Edna, slowly.

"Yes, unless you and Ralph decide to go there on your wedding tour. It would be a nice place, I should judge, to pass the silly season of married life. The more I think of it, Edna, the more I am convinced it is the best thing for you. Ralph is twenty-two; you are twenty one. Between you there is nearly a million dollars. He needs a wife, and if he doesn't find one pretty soon I won't be answerable that he doesn't go to the devil, the same as half the other young idlers. You need a husband—nobody more. I shall speak to Ralph about it and send him up here."

"You will return in a few days, at the most," she said, ignoring the levity of his closing words.

"Yes, by Thursday, probably. Treat Ralph kindly, but be careful not to give him as much freedom as you do me. He is made of saltpeter and charcoal. With a girl like you there is no telling what might happen. Ralph's got the Melbourg blood in him, you know.

Then he kissed her good-by and went out into the street, humming a light air that he had heard at some opera.

CHAPTER III.

LOVE VS. $30,000 A YEAR.

Ralph Melbourg was one of a type of young men often found in America, and, it might truly be said, in other countries as well, who, having inherited enough of this world's goods to make labor no necessity, try to find

in easy dissipation the best way to make their time pass agreeably. It is one of the worst effects of our industrial system that the aggregation of undue amounts of wealth in certain spots not only robs the producers of a large share of the product of their toil, but destroys the useful energy of those to whom such fortunes are bequeathed. It is the popular theory that a young gentleman, whose ancestors have provided him with a competency, does well to keep out of the already overcrowded channels of trade. "Let him live in a style becoming his station," say the wiseacres "Why need he struggle to increase a store already large enough for his wants?" The man of elegant leisure, living comfortably on his income, has to many minds reached the ideal state. If he can thus live from childhood, without a day's exertion of hand or brain, he is regarded as, in the highest sense, a gentleman. Let no laborer's son with grimy hands or tired head presume to dispute his title. And if the young heir chooses to spend some of his money in sowing wild oats, whose business is it but his own? He pays the bills, doesn't he? If at a wine supper he "gets full" the police are not troubled—his coachman and footman will carry him home. If he seduces the innocent daughter of some clodhopper he will do the "right thing" by her; he will support her offspring.

Such is the popular impression regarding the rights of inherited wealth. It is an impression almost as old as history; but this present author is willing to predict that the public mind is about to undergo an immense change in this matter; that within a few years a fortune will bring to its possessor new obligations; and that more equitable laws will make it impossible for any man to become a Colossus, under whose huge legs thousands must

crawl for the privilege of living on an earth that God made for all alike.

These few thoughts may, perhaps, be offered by the novelist without causing him to be accused of posing as a Reformer. At the worst he can only be charged with pausing to indite a sermon in the middle of a romance. Let us now return to our sheep, which in this case happens to be Mr. Ralph Melbourg.

Ten years before the date when our story opens, Laban Melbourg died at New York. Born amid the forests of Maine, he had hewn his way to the front in the lumber world, until, by "industry, frugality and business tact," as the obituarists put it, ("and by taking advantage of unjust laws," they might have added) he could call a million dollars his own. This million he divided at his death among his natural heirs, remembering every relation he could find with a greater or less present. His only child, Edna, received the largest sum, but the bequest was conditional upon her remaining single. The lumber merchant did not intend that his wealth should go to fortune-hunters and he believed that his daughter's blindness would prevent her hand being sought for any other reason. His second cousin's son, Ralph, who had liked nothing better as a boy than a trip to Maine with "Uncle Laban," was given a goodly amount, but in his case also there was a restriction. He could claim only the income of his property until his twenty-fifth year. Philip Westland, Sr., was then alive, and into his hands the trusteeship of these funds was placed, with the fullest confidence. When he died, his son continued the business, and the courts confirmed him as the natural successor to the father's trusts.

Philip Westland, the younger, was a different man from his sire in many respects. He devoted himself to busi-

ness, not so much on account of the profit it brought him as because it became his duty to protect his clients. The proper investment of trust moneys he had been taught to regard as the most sacred of human obligations. Years under his father's tutelage had impressed that on his mind. He would have bought a piece of land or a hundred shares of stock for himself with half the caution he used in making the same purchases for one of his customers.

The Melbourg estate, all of which was tied up in one form or another, was his largest single trust. The fact that much of it was invested in the Great Central Corporation was what took him so often to Riverfall. This investment was not of Westland, Jr.'s, own making. He had early decided to sell the stock whenever the condition of the market would warrant, but the constant labor agitations, and especially the two recent strikes, had so lowered its market value that to dispose of it now would involve too great an apparent sacrifice. Real estate in and around the metropolis was Westland's notion of an ideal investment. He did not care much for mill stocks now that the whim of a labor chieftain might destroy a year's profits in a month.

The Riverfall strike of the preceding summer had reduced the income of both Edna and Ralph considerably. Edna did not feel the difference, as she had the smaller sum there, and beside, her quiet life made it unnecessary for her to spend a quarter of her receipts. But her cousin fumed and fretted when he found his growing wants cut in upon in this fashion.

"Good heaven!" he exclaimed one day, to Westland, "I am unable to live now on $200 a week. What shall I do on $120? It will be clear starvation and nothing less!"

Westland laughed at the boy, for such he always called him, and mildly hinted that he must have formed extravagant habits.

"Extravagant!" cried Ralph, contemptuously. "Why, there is young Astorfelt, my chum, who has $1,500 a month, and more if he wants it! I feel awful mean in his company, when I have to say 'No' to a dozen suggestions every week, just because I can't afford anything."

"His family goes back several generations beyond yours," smiled Westland. "You date from your father's second cousin; he had a great-great-grandfather."

"I don't care!" was the reply. "I can't live on $500 a month, and that's all there is to it! You must give me more."

Then Westland told him, in a manner he could not mistake, that he might as well ask him to break into the sub-treasury vaults as to exceed by one penny the amount specified in Laban Melbourg's will. And Ralph snapped out:

"If the income on those devilish stocks should drop to zero, I should starve, I suppose?"

"Perhaps, in such a dire contingency as that, the courts would aid you. I am sworn to a certain line of policy and I cannot deviate from it. But, what do you do with your money, Ralph? You have a good deal, after all. I would like to see an account of your expenses."

The two men were such good friends, in spite of the difference in their years and habits, that the question only brought a smile to Ralph's cheek. Only a smile? Yes, it brought the least trace of a blush also. For Ralph, if to a certain extent a young reprobate, was not yet a very hardened one.

"You know, Phil," said he, (he always called Westland by his first name, as he had heard "Uncle Laban" do, years before, and as Edna did) "that a young fellow who wants to see anything of Life in these days needs money. I have to live in a suite of rooms, don't I? I must dine once in a while. I must take an occasional spin on the road—in a hired rig, I'm not rich enough to own one—like the rest of the boys. I may sometimes want a box at the theatre, and I have been known to wear clothes. Now how far will $120 go for these, to say nothing of other things, equally necessary to a young fellow's peace and comfort."

Here his blush deepened, making his fair young face look more like a girl's than ever. And Ralph could have disguised himself in feminine attire and evaded detection easily.

"For instance, women?" insinuated Westland. "I thought so."

There was no rebuke in his tone. That would have been beyond his rights as a trustee of property. There was no badinage, either. He did not encourage Ralph's immoralities, but neither did he frown on them. He paid the young man the income of the property he held in trust for him, as regularly as the day came around. What Ralph did with the money was his own business. In the conversation recorded there was no hint to the contrary. It was on account of the complaint of its insufficiency that the question of items was raised.

"Well, isn't a girl all right?" asked Ralph. "I tried to be economical about it. She was a dressmaker's apprentice, earning four dollars a week, when I first met her. 'There,' I said to myself, 'is a creature whose wants will be moderate.' In a month she wanted *silks!* She has seven rings now, three of them *diamonds!* I'll

bet her underclothing costs more than every rag I wear. You ought to see the laces! She thinks champagne hardly good enough to drink and she wouldn't ride in a street-car to save her life. Six months ago she lived on oatmeal and sausage. To-day—whew! I'd like you to glance over her bill of fare!"

Westland had to laugh at the comical look that Ralph gave him.

"And you are surprised?" he said.

"Why shouldn't I be?"

"Was the girl virtuous when you first met her?"

"Well, I should hope so, at this expense!" laughed the young man. "I've no fault except her extravagance to find with Nathalie. But she doesn't know where to put the brake on. This cut-down in my receipts makes not the slightest difference. If I had Astorfelt's cash I wouldn't take a mint for her; but, with a hundred-and-twenty a-week! It gives me the blues to think of it!"

Westland had grown sober.

"Do you wish to know what *I* think?" he asked.

Ralph bowed assent.

"When a virtuous girl surrenders herself to a man she can never get too much from him. She has thrown away everything in life—for what? Love? It will last her a few weeks or months. Money? Then let her secure all of it she can. Were she to gain in exchange the wealth of the Vanderbilts it would be a bad bargain for her."

A look of great astonishment came into Ralph's face.

"Why, Phil," he exclaimed, "you speak as if you knew!"

"Not from personal experience, if that is what you mean No woman has ever made any impression on my heart, and I think none ever will. But if I were—a thing

I cannot conceive—to accomplish the seduction of a pure girl, I would lay all my possessions, all my being at her feet, and pass every remaining hour in an endeavor, that I know would be wholly vain, to undo the irreparable injury I had caused her."

He paused and, as Ralph did not reply, he added, with more cheerfulness:

"I am not reading you a lecture, my boy, but only letting you a little into my thoughts as far as they concern myself. I know full well I have peculiar views, which I was betrayed into expressing."

Ralph roused himself like a man who has been half asleep.

"You'd give a fellow the jim-jams, Phil! If it hadn't been me with Nathalie, it would have been some one else. Of course, I sha'nt ship her off without fair notice, but I can't let her ruin me, can I?"

"Certainly not," said Westland, now quite himself again. "You know it is not my style to lecture anybody, and you must not mind a word I have said. Only, your income is fixed for the next year at least. There will be no dividends from Riverfall at present. Business is business, and debt is a terrible nuisance. That is the only part of your concerns I have any right to talk about."

So Ralph went back to Nathalie and tried to impress upon her mind the true condition of his affairs. He told her plainly that unless she could limit her expenses to a reasonable sum he must give her up. She laughed a good deal at his earnestness and could not be persuaded that the whole affair was anything less than a huge joke. Indeed, she seemed to consider life itself a gigantic Picnic. As a little French immigrant, twelve years before, she had played on the Bowery sidewalks

and thought it delightful. When she was sent to learn the trade of dressmaking, at Mme. Meliere's, she liked that very well, too. Her excellent appetite took the hardship from the coarse food she ate. She trimmed the bare walls of her attic chamber with pictures cut from the French illustrated papers. She tied her hair with bits of ribbon found on the floor of the modiste's parlors, fastened her collar with a shilling pin and went forth to conquer the susceptible hearts of the young men who frequented the neighboring concert cafés. As Ralph said, she was sure to have been somebody's prey. He happened to see her one evening when strolling far out of his usual haunts in search of adventure. He met her several times after that by appointment, took her to ride in a carriage, initiated her into the delights of a supper at an up-town restaurant. Then he promised to pay for her room and board and give her ten dollars a week as pocket-money—and she was his.

The ten-dollar arrangement, as we have seen, did not last long. With the quickness of her race, Nathalie's wants kept pace with the opportunities of gratifying them. Ralph uncautiously opened a new world to her and she was not slow in desiring to possess it. At first he was pleased at her admiration for finery and at the rapid transformation from gamine to young lady that took place in her attire. The night he first installed her in a flat on Fourth avenue every article she wore would not have tempted a two-dollar bill from the pocket of a Chatham street old-clothes dealer. He would not permit her to go out of doors with him until an entire change had been made in her dress. Nothing she brought with her was adjudged worthy of retention Nathalie learned quickly. She soon had as great a contempt as Ralph for cheap things. She threw her brass

rings into the fire and held out her fingers for gold and jewels. She imitated the mistresses of Ralph's friends, with whom she was brought in contact, like a veritable little ape. She bought tooth-brushes, nail-brushes, delicate toilet soaps, Florida water, creams and powders without limit. She thought silken hose none too fine for her shapely legs and looked with disdain upon a fifteen-dollar hat that her milliner brought her. Pretty as a picture even in her calicoes, she grew into a perfect fairy under the touch of the golden wand.

And Ralph grew to like her immensely. Had his two-hundred a-week been doubled, instead of reduced, (as he had no doubt it should have been) he would have been quite content with his Nathalie. The unexpected cut-down left him in unpleasant straits.

A few days after Westland's talk with Edna, he had an opportunity to sound Ralph on the marriage question. The young fellow had come in to draw his money and again complained with bitterness of his inability to live on so beggarly a sum.

"There is one thing I ought to tell you," said the trustee. "If a general strike in the New England cotton mills should occur, as now seems more than probable, even your present income will be materially lessened. Your property is invested almost altogether in mill stocks. That is the way Mr. Melbourg left it, and up to within a few years they paid handsomely. Last year, as you are aware, the Great Central Corporation lost money on account of its long suspension of business. If the other mills also suspend, you will not have above fifty dollars a week."

"Fifty dollars!" ejaculated Ralph, in horror "That wouldn't pay my tailor!"

"It would pay mine," smiled Westland. "In fact I do

not spend much more than fifty dollars a week the year through."

"Oh!" broke out Ralph, "but you are so devilish virtuous, you know! You don't need clothes, and you don't drink champagne, and you have no millinery bill to settle. I wish you'd take fifty dollars a week and follow Nathalie. She'd lead you a chase! You give me the shakes, Phil, upon my word. Fifty dollars!"

"Now, Edna's property," continued Westland, eyeing Ralph with complacency, "is mostly in real estate here in the city. She will draw a cool six hundred every week she lives, if all the spinners in New England go out."

"Hang these fellows who make wills!" cried Ralph, with vehemence. "Could anything be more senseless than Uncle Laban's disposal of his property? Edna couldn't spend a quarter of her money, if she tried, and I am hampered in the hardest way to exist at all. He should have exactly reversed it. Six-hundred-a-week Jiminy! Wouldn't I like to exchange incomes with her!"

Westland leaned toward him and spoke in a serious tone.

"Do you wish to add $600 a week to your income Ralph? If you do, I will tell you how."

Ralph stared at him.

"Do you wish to know? Nothing is more easy. Marry your cousin."

"Oh, come now, that's a joke!" said Ralph, with a disappointed look. "Uncle's will provides that she is to lose everything the day she marries."

"And who gets it?"

Ralph looked a little startled. He had never thought of that before.

"*You* do," said Westland. "There is no trouble

about it. Induce Edna to become your wife and your financial troubles are over."

There was a pause and then Ralph said:

"I couldn't, Phil. Besides, I always thought Edna was waiting for *you*. I know she likes you and I have always supposed nothing but the will kept you apart."

Westland frowned as much as he was capable of frowning.

"An angel, with an endless purse, would not tempt me, Ralph. I have the highest regard for your cousin. More than that I never felt for any woman. As for money, I already have all I need."

The younger man hesitated. He seemed to be revolving the matter over in his mind.

"What put this into your head?" he asked, suddenly.

"My regard for both of you. Your cousin's income, as you say, far exceeds her wants. Yours is much under your capacity to enjoy life. She is a beautiful girl, whose one misfortune only makes her other qualities seem the brighter. Her nature is affectionate. By marrying you she would be certain of her position; and as you could not, even were you so disposed, dissipate the principal of the fortune she would bring you, her ease and comfort would be assured. You may be what the world calls a little wild, but you would never wilfully injure a wife's feelings. Probably marriage would sober you."

Ralph relapsed into a brown study.

"Nathalie?" he said, at last.

Westland smiled.

"What a name," he said, "to bring into a discussion regarding a fortune of $30,000 a year!"

"Ah!" said Ralph. "But it was mostly on her account you see, that I wanted the money."

He looked quite distressed.

"I thought," said the trustee, "that you might marry and become a good, upright, respectable member of society."

Ralph shook his head decidedly.

"Why, Phil," he cried, "I'm only twenty-two! How can a fellow become respectable at twenty-two?"

They both laughed together at the oddity of the remark.

"You must not marry Edna to break her heart," said Westland. "That is not my purpose at all. I am seeking your mutual happiness."

Then there was another pause.

"If I should marry Edna," Ralph asked, finally, and with an effort, "could I—never—see Nathalie again?"

"After marriage!" exclaimed Westland, as if greatly shocked. "I should say that would be very wrong!"

The young man reddened. "You speak as if such things were never done," he said, fretfully.

"I am no longer your guardian," was the reply, "and you are responsible for your own acts, but I shall never counsel you to marry with the deliberate intention of retaining your mistress. It looks as if it would be easy to choose. On the one hand is your cousin and her $30,000 a year, which means ease, even luxury. On the other is your uneducated and capricious dressmaker's apprentice, with a straightened purse and a not over bright future. Which shall it be?"

When Ralph looked up, after another long pause, there was a bright light in his handsome eyes.

"I think I prefer Nathalie," he said.

CHAPTER IV.

"NO FLESH AS CHEAP AS HUMAN FLESH."

The Marchioness of Riverfall was sitting in her little sitting-room one evening, when Hugh Mayfield ascended the stairs. She answered his knock with a friendly greeting, and cordially bade him enter. The "mill-hand" removed his hat as he crossed the threshold, with the air of one who salutes his sovereign. No weaver or spinner in Riverfall ever met Ellen without the same sign of the high respect with which she was regarded, and Hugh seemed to feel fully the veneration he professed. Yet there was no gulf between these two persons, such as usually divides ruler and subject. They met as attached friends, adherents of a common cause, believers in the same labor creed, equally confident of the ultimate emancipation of themselves and their class from the capitalistic yoke. Both performed their day's work in the mills of the Great Central Corporation. Both devoted their leisure hours to ameliorating the present and endeavoring to improve the future condition of their fellow-workmen. Contrary to the custom of many "labor reformers," they accepted neither salary nor gratuity for their services. They were glad to work in the cause because their hearts were there.

"Have you heard what the directors did at their meeting to-day?" was Ellen's first question.

Hugh marked her anxious expression and answered, regretfully:

"Yes, a cut-down has been ordered, to take effect November 1st."

They were seated on opposite sides of a plain wooden table. Ellen placed her elbows upon it and rested her face in both her hands.

"They say," pursued Hugh, "that the strike of last year made it impossible for them to pay a dividend that they have a right to earn a reasonable percentage on their capital; and that, at the present rate of wages, they cannot do so. I learned all this from Carter's son, who is Mr. Baker's errand boy, and was told to stay in the room."

Ellen's expressive countenance took on a subdued look as she listened, but not a sign of discouragement was visible. She bent her dark eyes upon her companion, drinking in every word of the unpleasant tidings with the resignation of an invalid.

"Was Mr. Westland there?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Did he say anything?"

"He was the most emphatic of them all. 'We must teach these people a lesson,' were his words. 'It is time it was settled who owns these mills. If these spinners do, we will abandon the field to them, but let us make the test first.' Jimmy was very careful to remember. All your talks seem to have gone for naught."

Ellen took up a pocket Testament which lay on the table.

"It is eighteen centuries since Christ died for us, and yet we feel the oppressor's hand. Shall we therefore say He lived on earth in vain? No, Hugh. The seed I have planted in Mr. Westland's heart will bear fruit some day; be sure of it."

He returned the radiant look she gave him.

"How hopeful you always are!" he cried. "At the darkest hour it is almost daylight with you. But you

have not heard all. 'We have been too lenient in the past,' he said. 'I am in favor of giving Mr. Baker absolute power. We ought to have a mill-owners' league, so that when the workers in one mill go out every spindle in the country shall cease to revolve. If we are to have a strike over this cut-down it can be so managed that we shall never have another. We must give these people a taste of idleness that they will not care to repeat in this generation. We ought to be ready to lock the mill doors and leave Riverfall to itself for a year if necessary. Hitherto we have appeared over anxious to resume. The hands knew that, at the worst, they could accept the mill's figures at any time. On the next strike I want to see them await our pleasure. It will cost us something, but we shall profit by it in the end. The day has passed when any irresponsible man—or woman—should dictate terms to five millions of capital.'"

The Marchioness heard every word without changing her attitude. A stray lock of hair fell carelessly across her face, adding to its former piquancy. Only the throbbings of her full bust, innocent of corset, discernable through her plain print dress, betrayed the effect the story had upon her.

"What does he think we are—cattle?"

"Worse!" replied Hugh. "He would not risk the lives and health of cattle as he risks ours. No flesh is held as cheap as human flesh. To use the expression of the day, our race is suffering from over-production. We are slaves to masters who do not even have the obligation to provide us food. How is our condition better than that of the Russian serf when he was tied to the soil? We have no trade but that of the mills. If one mill grinds us beyond endurance we can go to another—

and find the same condition of things there. This cut-down is ordered. What can we do?"

"Strike!" said Ellen, laconically.

"At the approach of winter! You see they have adroitly presented the issue to us at the very worst time of year."

"We must destroy their profits," she said, with decision. "They are susceptible to no other argument. But do not wait until November. Appoint a committee at once to wait upon them and ask to have the wages fixed for the year ensuing. If they refuse to discuss the matter, if they strive to gain time by delay, if they insist on the cut-down rate, let every man, woman and child quit work immediately."

Hugh looked surprised at the audacity of the proposition.

"We shall listen to you, of course," he answered. "We shall obey you. But, have you thought of everything?"

She clasped her hands spasmodically together.

"What have I not thought of? Hunger? Cold? Nakedness? Little children crying for food and fire? Suffering women, despairing men? Yes, I have thought of it all! I know what a long strike means. But imagine yourself on the far Western prairie, with your larder exhausted and no possible means of replenishing it from any point near by. What would you do? Sit down and weep? No, you would undertake the journey toward a land of plenty. The march might be long, the nights cold; the wolves might howl around your camp-fire; the sun might scorch you, the dews chill you, but you would still struggle on. We must make our stand right where we are against these capitalists! If they can cut the scanty wages we now receive they can cut them again and yet again! If to-day we submit to be crushed to the earth, to-morrow we shall

be ground in the mire. We must strike. Our people must be impressed with the full significance of the move As Mr. Westland says, it will be a decisive contest."

A knock interrupted the speaker, and when she opened her door the presence of the man whose name was last upon her lips certainly surprised her a little. However, she bade him enter in a pleasant voice, and gave him a chair. Hugh rose and took his hand with no greater or less outward cordiality than usual.

"I did not intend to be an eavesdropper," said Westland, "but I could not avoid hearing my name mentioned as I reached the landing. It is perhaps a natural curiosity that leads me to wonder what you could find interesting in that subject."

Hugh glanced at Ellen, as if it were for her to make reply, but she signified that he might answer, and he said:

"We were speaking of the relations of the Great Central Corporation to its work-people."

"Well," said Westland, pleasantly, "in what respect has the corporation offended its employes this time?"

"There are rumors of an intended cut-down."

Westland evinced a little astonishment at the rapidity with which the news had traveled. Then he looked at the calm face that Ellen turned in his direction, and wondered what she thought of him.

"If there should be a cut-down," he replied, evasively, "it would be ordered from sheer necessity. Probably you are aware of the fact that the stockholders have had no dividends for a year. You would hardly claim that they ought to invest their money here without reaping some reward. Or—perhaps you would, though," he added, pausing.

Hugh glanced at Ellen, in the hope that she would

take up the argument, but she gave no sign, and he proceeded:

"For ten years previous to the last one the Great Central Corporation paid an average dividend of twelve per cent. on a capital notoriously watered. Its five millions of stock represents an actual outlay of not more than one million dollars. In other words, the stockholders have pocketed sixty per cent. in profits. Last year the workers asked for a slight increase in wages. When it was refused, they went out in a body. The mill was idle twelve weeks, and I presume it was on that account that no dividend was paid."

Westland nodded assent to the latter proposition.

"In those twelve weeks," he said, impressively, "the employes of the corporation lost $200,000 that they might have earned. In the same time, from various causes connected therewith, the stockholders lost more than double that amount. At the end of the strike the hands returned to work at the old wages. The total result was a loss of nearly three-quarters of a million, as I figure it. Now please tell me, if you know, what was the gain?"

Mayfield did not immediately reply and Westland, after waiting a moment, continued:

"From the results of that strike, as you have rightly guessed, the stockholders received no dividend. The product of other mills filled the place of theirs in the markets. The evil results are still felt. If a dividend is to be earned during the next twelve-month, expenses must be decreased in some way. Had the work-people considered before the last strike they could have predicted this result. By abandoning the mills at an important time they caused a heavy loss. They may

now be asked to make it up, and if so, how can they call it unjust?"

"You contend that these stockholders must have their sixty per cent., even if it comes out of our sweat and blood?" said Hugh.

"I contend, in one word, that I have the right to purchase labor, if I am an employer, at the lowest market price. If the owner of a bale of cotton asks me more for it than I believe it worth, I will not make the purchase until he comes to my terms. If the owner of a day's work does the same, I will treat him in like manner. Any other course would disrupt the entire fabric of business."

It was Ellen who answered that.

"You speak of what you have the *right* to do. Perhaps you mean the *power*?"

"I mean both," he said.

"You have lived in this world for how long—thirty years?"

"About that."

"What have you ever done," she said, earnestly, "to earn the food you have eaten and the clothes you have worn?"

"Well," he smiled, "I have been a guardian of minors and a trustee of estates. It has kept me pretty busy, and I might add without immodesty that those who have employed me have expressed satisfaction."

Ellen leaned her elbows upon the table and rested her face in her hands, as she had done before he came. He thought he had never seen her look more picturesque.

"No doubt," she said; "no doubt you have done well for them. But, tell me, have you ever *earned* a penny in your life? Have you ever *produced* anything?

Is there any necessity of life that owes its existence to your personal labor?"

Westland lowered his eyes under her searching gaze.

"That is a most remarkable series of personal questions," he said.

She hardly seemed to hear his answer.

"You have lived thirty years. Is any one the better or the wiser for it? You have had the charge of much property as trustee. You have made it produce the highest interest possible. Perhaps some of those employers of yours have more money than they will ever need—double what they spend—it is the same to you! Perhaps the people from whom the money comes are very poor and draw it from the bottoms of nearly empty pockets—you do not care! Under the law it is *due*, and you collect it. You are acting *legally*, and our great, good, noble, paternal government will support you, even if you take the bed from under a child that is dying!"

Westland found it difficult to preserve his nonchalant demeanor in the teeth of such an arraignment, but he thought it best not to interrupt her. While she did not convince, she interested him.

"What valuable thing have you ever done for your race, I ask again?" pursued the Marchioness of Riverfall. "Did you ever place a potato or a grain of corn in the earth? Did you ever plant a seed from which fruit has grown? Have you woven a yard of cloth, put a needle into a shoe, levelled a tree for firewood? Have you taught children to read, given medicine to the sick, dug a grave for the dead? Many persons have labored for you since you were born; what have you done for them? Nothing! You have lived on the product of other men's toil. Take, for instance, that suit of clothes

you are wearing Somebody tended a flock of sheep on the plains; somebody sheared them of their fleeces, washed the wool, combed it, transported it many miles, carded, spun, wove, colored, cut, made and pressed it into its present form. It is a handsome suit, but it does not become you well, because I know *you have never paid for it!*"

Hugh was about to interpose a word, but Westland, with a quick motion, counseled him to silence. Ellen did not offend him. He was entranced with her eloquence.

"I can think of you as a babe," continued the Marchioness, looking through Westland rather than at him. "You had a hired nurse, of course, being the child of parents well-to-do. A seamstress sewed on your soft garments. A doctor was summoned if you cried. When you grew older teachers expended their energies instilling into your mind the knowledge that may be found in books. They taught you how to read the iniquitous laws of your country; to compute the compound interest on four millions of watered stock, at twelve per cent. per annum; to write essays on the unaccountable growth of vice and crime among the poor. Servants attended you, prepared your meals, swept your chamber, gratified your every necessity. When you reached the age of manhood, did you seek to render equal service to other helpless ones? No! You were a *gentleman*—God save the mark! You never did anything, you never *mean* to do anything, to help support the great table at which you have eaten so greedily!"

He listened with unchanging countenance, and when she paused he said, with deference:

"I have no wish to dispute your assertions, but I am wondering if you think it a wholly disreputable profes-

sion to manage the affairs of the widows and orphans whose interests have been committed to my charge. Husbands and fathers have died content, feeling that their loved ones were provided for, confident that I would carry out their wishes in the disposal of the property they had acquired. Ought I to abandon my wards and prove unfaithful to my trusts? I ask you in all honesty what you think of that."

Ellen replied without a moment's hesitation:

"The System under which you are acting is totally wrong. Because a man has succeeded in wresting fifty times his share from the earth, the mill or the mine, it is no reason why his widow should fold her hands in idleness or his children grow up drones for others to support. I grant you that no child should be deprived of education nor of the innocent enjoyments of youth. But, by what scale of justice must one set of children toil, for instance, in the mills of the Great Central Corporation, in order that another set may live in luxurious ease? The will of a millionaire or the fiat of a judge has placed certain sons and daughters of wealth under your protection but, as a stockholder in these mills at Riverfall, there are also other children to whom you owe guardianship. Yes, children young and children old, your brothers and sisters by the same Almighty Father, who will surely hold you to a strict account when your final books are opened!"

The silence that followed deepened the impressiveness of these words. Mayfield was the first to speak.

"I think Ellen will allow me to say that in her arraignment of Capital she does not mean to be especially severe upon you, personally, Mr. Westland. She has only, I believe, used you vicariously, as representing a class."

"That is all, certainly," said Ellen, with a beautiful smile that bore no trace of animosity. "You are Hugh's friend, and that makes you mine. We may differ for the present, but I think we shall do so with good nature. I do you the justice to think you a perfectly honest man, from your wholly erroneous standpoint. If we ever convince your reason, I am sure you will come to our aid Meantime I trust we shall see you often."

"I admit that there is a fascination in your argument," said Westland, "and yet your views seem to me quite Utopian. But we shall soon be face to face with a real problem, in which I may be compelled to take an important part. The complications which will arise may strain our friendship; I hope they will not break it. Before they do anything rash I trust the people of Riverfall will consider well. The mill-owners were never so strong in their determination to run their business after their own methods."

All three had arisen, as the speaker showed a purpose to depart. Ellen smiled as she responded, "We also are determined," and as he looked into her resolute eyes he could not doubt that a great contest was at hand.

Westland descended the stairs and walked along the deserted streets to his hotel. An odd thing came into his mind—a controversy he had lately read an account of, on the subject of platonic affection between men and women.

"The case of Hugh and Ellen looks like that sort of thing," was his mental comment. "Their attachment is remarkable, and no one could look for a moment into her pure face and harbor the thought of anything base.

CHAPTER V.

THE WICKEDEST MAN.

One afternoon Edna Melbourg received a call from her cousin Ralph, who proposed that she take a ride with him out toward Harlem, in a dog-cart which he had brought for the purpose. After recovering from the surprise into which this request threw her, for he had never suggested such a thing before, she accepted the invitation and proceeded to another room to prepare herself. Ralph walked nervously up and down the parlor, examining the pictures in an absent way, for his cousin's blindness had not prevented her from decorating her apartments with many products of the painter's art. Westland had selected most of them for her, or perhaps it would be more correct to say, she had selected them through him. He often accompanied her to studios and artists' sales, where she passed happy hours in listening to his descriptions of the works she could not see. When his account of any picture pleased her she would ask for the most minute particulars regarding it, and a purchase was frequently the result. She noted with exactness the location of each work when they were hung in her rooms, and frequently described them, one after another, to callers, with a fidelity that was astonishing. Another thing that she particularly delighted in was statuettes, both of famous men and women, and of well-known works of art. These she took much pleasure in touching with her delicate fingers, having no difficulty in recognising each one as soon as she placed her hand upon it. Nothing in her abode con-

veyed the least suspicion of the misfortune of the occupant. Ralph thought of this as he stood before one of the numerous long mirrors and surveyed his own well-knit form. Mirrors in a blind girl's room!

"They seem almost as much out of place here as a husband would be," was his thought.

Ralph had the highest opinion of his cousin Edna. Though a year his junior, she appeared to him enough older in wisdom to be his mother, almost. She had been a "young lady" nearly as long as he could remember. Westland's notion that they might be mated seemed quite visionary. He had not come this afternoon for the purpose of proposing. And yet, unless that idea had been advanced, he would not have been there at all. He wanted to be better acquainted with his cousin. He began to feel that he had done wrong to neglect her so, when she was the only relation he had in the city. Besides, an acquaintance with $30,000 a-year ought to be cultivated.

When they were seated in the cart and had ridden two or three blocks, Edna surprised Ralph by asking what was the matter with him that afternoon.

"You are troubled about something, cousin," she said. "Tell me what it is."

"I? Troubled?" he answered, confusedly. "Why do you think that?"

"Oh, I can tell," responded Edna. "We blind people can comprehend some things better than you who have sight. In the first place you are taciturn, which is something very new for you. Then, your movements are more uneasy than is your habit. Instead of taking a seat in my parlor and looking out of the window while you were waiting for me, you paced the floor. Then again, though you have known me all your life, this is

the first time you ever took me to ride. Am I not justified in the presumption that you have some trouble on your mind that you think I may be able to lift, or at least to advise you about. Come, cousin, own the truth, for I assure you equivocation is useless."

Ralph listened astounded, as she drew the cords of evidence about him.

"Well, you *are* observing!" he said.

"You admit the correctness of my accusation," she answered, evidently pleased at this proof of her discernment. "Now, what is it?"

Ralph was the poorest person in the world at dissembling, and on this occasion he astonished himself no less than his cousin by his reply:

"Say, Edna, do you want to get married?"

A bright color filled the girl's cheek at the question, so wholly unexpected. She drew several very short breaths, but almost instantly regained a portion of her outward composure.

"Who told you to ask me that?" she said. Then, as he hesitated, she added, "I know, Mr. Westland."

The young man's eyes opened so wide at this guess that his cousin would have had no difficulty in convicting him, on that proof alone, had she been able to see their expression.

"Why, Edna—" he began.

"You are stammering," she interrupted. "Why not be truthful? Let me give you a lesson in frankness. I like you very much, but I do not want you for a husband. We ought to be attached friends—not lovers—and I trust from now on I shall see you more frequently. That is, if your other acquaintances will consent to spare you."

Ralph was so taken aback by her cool responses, and

especially by the mediumistic powers that she seemed to possess, that he could only repeat, "Other acquaintances!" with an equivocal intonation that did not escape the quick senses of the blind girl. She made an instant and successful guess.

"Yes; that fair creature, for instance, who has taken up so much of your thoughts during the past year."

There was little risk in making this plunge. There are few young men who could not find some one in their list of feminine acquaintances to fit the description. Even if Ralph should protest with evident sincerity against her accusation, all she need do would be to laugh it off as a joke. But Edna had the wisdom of her sex combined with the keenness of those to whom physical vision is denied. She remembered Westland's unambiguous words, "He's got the Melbourg blood in him."

"Tell me about her, Ralph," she said, softly. "Tell me what you mean by proposing marriage to one woman while your heart is already enthralled by another."

"Goodness, Edna!" he cried, desperately. "You take a fellow's breath away! Love is one thing, you know—and—and marriage—why, that's another."

"Ah!" she retorted, with mock dignity. "So you were going to marry me and reserve your *love* for someone else!"

He was more startled at this than at anything else she had said. She perceived his agitation quite as distinctly as if she could have looked into his disconcerted countenance.

"Either you are a clairvoyant," he said, "or, what is more likely, Phil Westland has been giving me away."

The color left the blind girl's face, and she responded, in an expressionless tone:

"You admit that he knew of your plan, then?"

"Yes," confessed the young man, "if you must know. Phil knew of it and he gave me one of his lectures, too. It was mean of him to tell you, though," he added, in a burst of indignation. "He knew I gave it up as soon as he suggested I should."

The young man had no idea of the way he was playing into the hands of the shrewd woman whose talents he so little understood. She could read him as easily as another person could have read an open book. Edna easily conceived that a woman whom a man proposed to continue loving after his marriage with another must be of easy virtue. "Love is one thing, marriage another," he had said. Partly to satisfy the curiosity of her sex, and partly for a more creditable reason, she decided to prove the matter to the bottom.

"Mr. Westland never mentioned such a thing as that to me," she replied. "He would not think of it, I am sure, and if he had I should not have listened. My information comes from another source, which you must not ask me to reveal. Now, a woman's question is naturally this: Why do you not marry the one you love?"

"Nathalie!" cried Ralph, unguardedly, for he no longer doubted that she knew his entire secret. "*Marry her!* That's not the sort of girl that people marry. I think you must be joking, cousin. Nathalie is pretty and bright, and she was good enough till she came to me, but—she is uneducated, and—oh! of course she'd never do for a *wife!* How would you like me to bring her to call on you; or take you out riding in the same carriage? More than that, I'd have to marry some woman who had money of her own, or we couldn't live. Did you know I'd got whittled down to a miserable $120 a week?"

"No," she said. "I thought you had nearly double that. How did it happen?"

"Why, those confounded strikers at Riverfall! A lot of the stuff Uncle Laban left me to draw on was in the Great Central Corporation, which hasn't paid a cent of dividend for a year, and may never again. I'm in a stew half the time. I only wish he had left my funds in real estate, the way he did yours."

Edna listened with interest.

"When he died the Riverfall stocks paid better than the real estate," she said, with a business air. "But, my dear Ralph, throwing aside for a moment the moral questions involved, which you can understand as well as I, are you not a reckless and extravagant boy to undertake the care of a young woman when you confess your inability to support a wife? I have heard that such connections are usually more expensive than legitimate ones."

It struck Ralph for the first time that they were getting into rather deep water.

"I think we'll change the subject, if you've no objection," he said. "I have asked you to marry me and you have refused, so I have no choice but to stick to Nathalie."

Miss Melbourg smiled, and placed one of her gloved hands on his.

"No, we will not change the subject just yet," she said. "I am not preaching to you, my dear cousin, though no doubt I ought. I am only talking in a reasonable, business-like way, which you should be able to bear. Now, to return to Nathalie. You say she was a good girl until she met you?"

"Yes."

"There is no doubt of that?"

"Not the slightest."

"And—with the exception of her relations with you—you believe she is good yet?"

"I would stake my life on it."

"Then I would like to meet her."

Ralph almost stopped the horse he was driving, as he heard this extraordinary suggestion.

"You!" he cried. "Do you know what you are saying?"

"Perfectly," she responded. "There are leagues, in my estimation, between your Nathalie and the class usually known as abandoned women. She is your true wife in all except a legal ceremony. I fear nothing from contact with her, for I know a girl cannot be very degraded in whose society my cousin Ralph finds such pleasure that he wished to continue in it even after his marriage with another. As a tribute to conventionality, however, I will not ask you to bring her to my rooms. I will go to hers."

Ralph thought a moment before he spoke.

"Why do you wish to meet her? I tell you," he added, bridling, "she is an awful nice girl! Only," he continued, regretfully, "I wish she wouldn't spend so much money. She wouldn't let you fill her up with advice, though. Hang it! She won't take that, even from me!"

Miss Melbourg hastened to reassure him

"I promise to do or say nothing to which either of you can object. I am so reasonable in my desires, Ralph, that I know you will not refuse me."

The good-natured fellow instantly responded that he had no objection if Nathalie was willing, but that he still thought the idea a peculiar one. So it was settled

that if the little French girl gave her consent he was to come for Edna on the evening of the following day.

Contrary to Ralph's expectations, Nathalie was delighted at the prospect of meeting his cousin, when he explained the situation to her; and when Edna arrived she came forward in a dainty evening costume, hardly less interested than the blind girl herself. The pretty flat which she now occupied was situated in Eleventh street, not far from Sixth avenue, and its furnishings had gone far to cause that depletion in his finances of which Ralph complained. It was a perfect bijou of a place—the rooms hardly averaging above twelve feet square—and so filled with furniture and bric-a-brac as to seem much smaller than they really were. Young Astorfelt had once remarked jocosely that it would not be an easy matter for an intoxicated man to make a safe tour of those apartments. Ralph piloted Edna through the nearest approach to a channel that he could find, and then presented the two young ladies to each other with the usual formalities.

"Miss LaVerre, my cousin, Miss Melbourg."

Edna held out her hand frankly and Nathalie took it. Then they seated themselves together on a *tête-à-tête*.

"My blindness compels me to use methods of identification which may seem strange to you," said Edna, "but you will pardon me, I am sure. May I touch your face with my fingers?"

Nathalie, whose countenance bore an expression of mingled amusement and sympathy, gave ready permission. Edna's hand was then passed searchingly over the French girl's features, and afterwards over her head and neck. The investigation was so thorough that Nathalie's smiles deepened, and at last she broke into an

audible laugh. It was a musical laugh, however, and not displeasing to any ears that heard it.

"Do you object to this?" said the blind girl, pausing in her occupation. "If you do—"

"Oh, not at all!" replied Nathalie. "It was impolite in me to laugh. I do not care in the least, only it seems so queer. Examine me all you please. I am beginning to rather like it."

Edna continued slowly, going over every feature a second time, and making the most minute observations. Then she asked Nathalie to stand, so that she could get a good idea of her height and size.

"You are not quite as tall as I, but you are a little stouter, and must weigh about the same."

She placed her hands on the rounded arms, and spanned the rather full waist.

"You are five feet two inches tall, and you weigh about one hundred and twenty-five pounds."

"One hundred and twenty-four, yesterday," said Nathalie. "Your cousin is a good guesser, Ralph."

"She is an excellent physiognomist, too," he answered "I should like to hear her opinion of you from that standpoint."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Why, a physiognomist," he exclaimed, mischievously, 'is one who judges people's character and disposition by the appearance of their faces. Tell us all about her cousin. I would like to know what sort of girl she is."

Nathalie uttered a little scream of disapproval.

"Oh, I didn't know you could do that!" she said to Edna. "I—I would rather you wouldn't—if you please!"

Her evident sincerity and her comical look of terror

forced a laugh that was almost a yell from her lover. She frowned on him with severity.

"I don't think that is nice," she said, majestically.

Miss Melbourg came to her assistance.

"I shall say nothing about it," she said, "while he is present. When we are alone sometime I will tell you what I read in your face, if you would like to have me."

"I should like it very much," was the reply, "when that man"—here she glared at Ralph—"is away. He makes too much fun of me now, and I don't want any one to help him."

Ralph took this broad hint and soon after asked to be excused for a short time, as there was an errand which he ought to do. This polite fiction was accepted at its true value. When the door closed behind him Edna said:

"Now, Miss La Verre—"

"Oh, call me Nathalie!" cried the girl. "I do not like that '*Miss*.'"

"And you will call me Edna?"

"Yes, I shall be glad to."

"Well, Nathalie, what do you think I came here for to-day?"

The French girl looked curiously at her companion, and answered without hesitation:

"To tell me I am very wicked; and so I am. I know it as well as you. I was brought up to go to church and confession, and to read the catechism. They are good things to do and I believe in them as much as ever, but they are so hard! It was not pleasant dressmaking at four dollars a week. Then, I love Ralph. How could I leave him? Oh, it is easy to talk! I am doing no one harm, and it makes me very happy."

She had a perceptible Gallic accent that lent a charm to her speech, and, as she proceeded, there was a distinct tremor to her musical voice.

"No," responded Edna, taking the girl's hand in her own, "I am not here with any such purpose. "If I had intended to advise you to leave Ralph I should not have secured his consent to come. We may not agree that the life you are leading is a proper one, but I will say nothing of that now. This is what I wanted to tell you: You may sometime be in great need of a friend. You know where Mr. Westland's office is. If such a time comes go there without hesitation and leave a note for me. He will see that I receive it as soon as possible."

Nathalie regarded her new friend with complete trust.

"You are very kind, madam," she said, "but what could happen to me?"

"Who can tell?" responded Edna. "This is a strange world. Girls who, a few years ago, were living as happily as you, are to-night in the lowest dens of New York. I would not like to have anything happen to throw you among their number. Not that I think anything will," she added, with a smile, perceiving with her rare intuition that the girl was about to protest. "But in case any trouble does arise a friend on whom you can call will be of value. There are also other dangers which you risk—shall I speak candidly? You may become a mother."

The French girl withdrew her hands with a spasmodic motion.

"Oh, I hope not!" she cried. "Not as I am now! And if I were really married nothing would make me happier. I never pass a child in the street that I do not want to take it up and kiss it!"

Miss Melbourg's sightless eyes were moist.

"There is much more that I would like to say to you," she said, "but not to-day. Do not forget that you have made me a promise. And now I will tell you what I find in your face. You have great affection, a sunny disposition, an honest mind and a love of the beautiful. Your light-heartedness may lead you to do thoughtless things, and your love of pretty clothes may make you extravagant, but you would sacrifice much in an emergency to aid one you cared for."

As she spoke, Edna passed her hands again over Nathalie's features, as if reading one of those books with raised letters which have proved such a boon to the blind. And so, indeed, she was.

"Ralph thinks much of you," she continued, softly, "and I know you will be good to him."

Young Melbourg soon returned and shortly afterward drove his cousin back to her Lexington avenue residence. Neither of them spoke until they reached their destination. Then Ralph, who ever since they started had been trying to find words, remarked:

"Well, cousin, how do you like her?"

"My dear Ralph," she replied, earnestly, "I like her very much—I like you both very much. But—forgive me for saying it—you seem to me at this moment the wickedest man I have ever known."

CHAPTER VI.

CONVERSE, THE ANARCHIST.

Trouble was evidently brewing at Riverfall. Mysterious whisperings were going the rounds among the employes of the Great Central Corporation. Secret meetings were held, lasting till past midnight. Agent Baker commented upon the strange fact that spinners and weavers who grumbled incessantly at the "long hours" of mill work could sit up so late and still be at their posts at the usual time each morning. But Agent Baker had a theory that mill-hands would grumble any way. When the pay was much higher than now they complained with almost equal energy. They always wanted higher wages, or fewer hours, or something else, merely because it was their nature to be dissatisfied.

Even the Canadians were getting to be as bad as the others. Nobody asked them to come to this country, and, if they didn't like the style, why didn't they return to the Dominion? Many of the other growlers were English and Irish—people who never saw meat in their own countries except at Christmas! Did any one ever hear of an English or Irish weaver going back? Never. What was the moral, then? Undoubtedly these people were treated better in America than they ever were before, and much better than they should be. So said Agent Baker, as many good and wise men have said before him, and are still saying. And he did more than say it—he thoroughly believed what he said.

There was just one employe of the Great Central Cor-

poration whom Agent Baker considered worth his notice, aside from the natural interest he might feel in all the necessary adjuncts to the mills under his charge. This employe was Ellen. He had had his eye on Ellen for a long time, had Agent Baker. He came to the mills earlier many a morning to see the Marchioness as she entered the great gate. He walked through one particular room more frequently than any other because she was there. He thought her a very foolish girl to slave her life away over a loom, with that figure of hers. He wondered that she continued year after year to bend her handsome neck over bobbins and shuttles. There were better opportunities for a girl like Ellen, unless Agent Baker was mistaken.

And still he was not likely to forget a certain day, some time before our story opens, when he sent for Ellen to come to his private office on a pretended errand in connection with her work. On that occasion, when he finished his reference to the point at issue, he asked her in his most winning tones why a girl of such evidently superior endowments had taken up a class of labor for which much less intelligence would suffice. As she at first made him no reply he mistook her silence, and, growing bolder, alluded to her beauty, which he said would adorn a mansion. His meaning became unmistakeable, but the agitation he looked for did not appear. He watched her cheek narrowly, and not another drop of blood came to mantle its rich color. Could his victory have been won so easily? Or, horrible thought! could it be she had already sunk to a point where his words awoke no shame? She did not leave him long in doubt. Rising with an air that would not have been unworthy of the Great Elizabeth, she

looked down at him for a moment, as if from an immeasurable height.

"Sir," she enunciated, with a distinctness that was almost painful, "you are incapable of understanding me were I to reply to you in the terms you deserve. I leave you my pity and my scorn!"

Agent Baker laughed disagreeably when the door closed behind her, but he did not feel quite comfortable. He had talked with "mill-girls" before, and his assistance had transplanted several of his employes from the garrets of Riverfall to more commodious quarters in New York, where he had frequent occasion to go on business. He had seen "mill-girls" before, but nothing exactly like this.

"Ellen has been reading novels, I guess," he said to himself, "and has got hold of a lot of high-flown language. She will think better of it by-and-by."

The Marchioness of Riverfall did not mention this occurrence to any one—not even to Hugh—and, though many noticed the increased haughtiness with which she invariably treated the agent, none suspected its full significance. The spinners and weavers had come to regard Ellen so highly that the idea of any one, even the corporation agent, making improper insinuations to her would have been received with incredulity. To the working people of Riverfall Ellen was more than a companion and friend, she was their Queen. Her simple word would quite suffice at any moment to stop every corporation wheel. When any difficulty arose between employer and employed, the question first asked was, "What does Ellen say?"

Agent Baker did not realize the extent of the "mill-girl's" influence, nor of the affection with which she was regarded. He did not know what was the undoubted

fact, that even his life would have been in imminent danger had she related to some of her followers all he had said to her. He looked down upon the "mill-hands" with that contempt too often shown by Capital toward the ladder on which it has climbed to opulence. He saw that Ellen had beauty and intelligence. He would have possessed himself of her, if he could, used her for a plaything till he grew tired of her, and then thrown her aside, as he had others. The world was made for mill-agents and directors, according to the theory of Agent Baker.

Mr. Baker had amassed a comfortable fortune, the greater part of which was invested in the mills over which he presided. As he had told the directors, he was ready to resign his position should there be another general strike. Many stockholders—as is the custom of the class—had criticised his management when they found their dividends cut off, and he was quite willing to give up the reins at any time. Westland, who represented large interests as trustee, was considered his natural successor, if he would consent to take the place Some of the directors thought a change of agents might discourage the intending strikers. The "hands" knew Baker, and realized that he was entirely soulless as far as the making of money was concerned. But Westland's utterances had spread like wildfire. His assertion that he would close the mills for a year, were he agent when another strike occurred—"till the grass grew in the streets," as some quoted it—had made a deep impression. It was one thing to go out of a mill into which they could return at pleasure, and quite another to abandon their work for a twelve-month. These facts were known to the directors, and they began to demand that Westland accept the position at once, in order if possible to

secure the inauguration of the cut-down without any suspension of labor.

Though much interested in the arguments he had heard from Ellen and Hugh, Westland never wavered in the least in his line of action. He still believed that duty to his wards demanded that all his efforts be directed to settling the labor question at Riverfall in a way to best serve the interests of the stockholders. All of his business training had led him into one way of looking at such matters. He may almost be said to have inherited his views, for his father had been a life-long trustee before him. He did not desire the agency of the Great Central mills on account of the salary attached, though it was a handsome one. His only object was to protect his clients and others of their class, and he had an idea that a rigorous policy would best subserve the purpose in the long run. It seemed to him that a Waterloo had best be fought, at whatever cost, rather than an interminable series of skirmishes.

Before deciding whether to accept the proposal of the directors, he determined to ascertain if they were of his own mind in this matter. At one of their meetings he put the question squarely before them. If he took the management of their property, would they stand to his back if it became necessary to stop all business for an indefinite time? Without a dissenting voice they promised all he asked. Then, and not till then, did he accept. Agent Baker's resignation was received and Agent Westland was elected in his place.

The first official act of the new agent was to post conspicuously a statement of the revised list of prices which were to rule on and after November 1st. Groups of men women and children gathered that night about these posters and read them through to the closing words. "By

order of the Directors, Philip Westland, Agent.' There were sad looks on most of the faces, but here and there a flashing eye or a set mouth betokened other thoughts. At eight o'clock Ellen, Hugh and the other leaders of the workpeople, met in private council to discuss the situation.

"We shall have your friend Westland to fight, it seems," said William Converse, one of the head spinners, to Hugh, as he entered the conference room.

"And *my* 'friend Westland,' too," remarked Ellen, quickly, noticing the inflection that Converse had put upon the word "friend."

"We shall soon see how friendly he is to any of us!" the man retorted. "If all I hear of him is true, he could be no friend of mine!"

His manner, though very earnest, was perfectly respectful.

"We can hardly restrict our personal friendships to those who agree with us on all questions," responded Ellen. "I have met Mr. Westland several times, and I consider him a gentleman. As far as he is a representative of Capital, we may and doubtless shall disagree. It is likely that he will try to carry out the wishes of men whose selfishness weds them to an odious system. In this attempt he will be very firm. We must meet him with equal firmness, but I think we can depend on being treated with perfect courtesy."

Converse stamped his foot impatiently. He was a Manchester [Eng.] man who had been born and bred in the atmosphere of the mills. The universal regard for Ellen's presence rested lighter on him than on any of the others. At times he found it impossible to resist an outbreak of feeling. He was practically an anarchist in se-

timent, and thought Ellen's patient methods a poor weapon with which to fight so great an enemy.

"Courtesy!" he repeated, with ill-concealed scorn. "It is not courtesy we want from these fine gentlemen, but justice! Soft words will buy us no bread. A man who acts as the tool of the rich stockholders who have voted to cut the wages of our girls from $5 to $4.25 a week is a monster of whom the world would well be rid. To you he may seem a friend, but to me he is a deadly enemy, and if the right time comes I shall treat him as such!"

There was a slight ripple of applause in the room. It was a peculiar collection of faces. Poverty and hard work had written indellible lines on most of them. Ellen and Hugh were, perhaps, the only exceptions. Nearly all wore the clothes in which they came from the mill, but two or three had made a slight attempt to improve their appearance. As it was in the middle of the week, unshaven chins were the rule, Sunday being the only time when most of them indulged in the luxury of a razor. Ellen was the only woman present, and among that odd crowd of men her intelligent, handsome countenance looked strangely out of place.

"We all know the object of this meeting," she said, quietly, rapping with a lead pencil on the table at which she had seated herself. "You have seen the posters announcing the rates that the corporation proposes to adopt November 1st. I think a small committee should be delegated to see if we can get this cut-down rescinded."

A growl from the Manchester man interrupted the speaker.

"Have you any suggestion?" she said, turning toward him.

"Much good your committee will do!" he snarled. "We sent one last year, when we had the other trouble, and it only wasted time. My advice is, strike, and have done with it!"

A murmur of hoarse voices endorsed the sentiment. "That's it." "Let us strike at once." "A committee will do no good," and similar expressions were heard.

"I agree with you that it will not be likely to have a favorable result," responded Ellen, "but it will have a moral effect on the public, and put us in a better condition to win their sympathy."

Converse gave a defiant snort.

"I tell you we have had enough of that sort of thing!" he cried. "The public! What did the public ever do for us? We must teach these mill-owners a lesson they will never forget. They worship but one god—wealth. Let us walk in a body out of the mills. Let us give them a week to restore the old schedule—a schedule shamefully low before this reduction. If they remain deaf to reason, I want to see every edifice they own in ashes; and, if that will not do, a few of the owners lying dead among the ruins! Public sympathy! Committee of conference! Bah! Fire and blood is what we want—and the sooner we have it the better!"

Not a ripple disturbed the placidity of Ellen's face during the delivery of this impassioned speech. She marked the fiery eye of the Englishman, the scowl, the upraised arm, the fist that struck the table almost hard enough to break it. Then, without comment, she named the members of the committee—Mayfield, Converse, and a spinner named McNamara. But the Englishman refused in the most positive manner to serve.

"I will undertake any reasonable errand in this business," he said, "but I could neither listen nor talk

patiently to these blood-suckers. If you make it an order, Ellen, of course I must go, but you will not do that. Put yourself on in my place. If any good can be done, you would be worth a hundred like me."

A general acclamatory expression was heard in favor of the last proposition, and Ellen consented to it reluctantly. The next hour was taken up in an informal discussion of the general subject at issue, at the end of which Ellen dismissed the meeting. As all rose to depart, she gave Converse a silent signal to remain. When the door had closed behind the last one of those who were going, she drew the bolt and turned imperiously to her sole companion. He had the ugly look still on his face. She walked toward him, and stood for a moment, silent, with folded arms.

"How long must I tell you the same things, day after day?" she queried. "Have you no memory whatever? Now, here is your very last warning. If you again break forth in the way you did to-night I shall decree your dismissal from the council. I have no use for incendiaries and murderers!"

Converse did not quail before her. His reply was terribly in earnest:

"*They* can kill *us*! *They* can burn our hearts out with ill-paid toil! That is all right—but we, *we* can do nothing!"

Ellen did not relax her sternness as she answered:

"You speak like a child—like a very angry child, who has no thought higher than that of revenge on one who has injured him. We have something of greater moment to accomplish, and must proceed with wisdom, not foolhardiness. Do I not know our wrongs as well as you? They are branded into my inmost soul! I have given my life to studying the remedy; and I tell you,

rash man, that cutting throats and firing buildings will only keep us the longer from the end we seek!"

"And so we must continue to bow the knee!" he answered, bitterly. "We must still beg for what we should demand! We must hear their talk about per cents. and dividends and market prices, and all that folde-rol! What revolution was ever accomplished by such methods? Had you lived in 1773 you would have spared the tea that the Americans threw into Boston Harbor! In '93 you would have held up your hands in horror at the sweetest sight of all the ages—the stream of aristocratic blood that flowed in the Place Louis XV! In '59 you would have cried "fanatic!" to good John Brown, whose glorious folly unshackled the limbs of millions! Ellen, you are wrong! It is my privilege—nay, my duty—to tell you of it here, when we are alone. I tried to curb my tongue in the assembly, but this poison rankles in my blood too deeply. I was born to be a *man*, and these mill-owners have made me a *thing!* For sixty-three hours of hard labor I now receive eight dollars; they mean to reduce it to less then seven! I am a single man—they have denied me wife and children—and I could support life on that sum. But when I see the others—the women and the little ones who are forced into the spinning and weaving rooms, toiling beyond their strength—my endurance gives out, and I could throttle one of their oppressors with as little compunction as I would a wolf who had ravaged my sheepfold!"

"You lack patience—" Ellen began; but he interrupted.

"Patience! How long must I be patient? I have worked in mills for twenty years. My father worked in them before me. My mother—I heard it from the other

women—hurried home during my first months of life to nurse me in the half hour allotted her at noon, hardly having time or strength left to eat a mouthful of the coarse mid-day meal! She died early, killed by the owners of that English mill, who rode in their carriages and lived like princes! Patience! A few sharp knives, a handful of powder, a bunch of matches, or a pound of dynamite may influence such men, but patience—never!"

Ellen did not move an inch from where she stood during this harangue. At times the rounded arms which were interlocked across her breast seemed to press more tightly upon each other, and her full lips shut so closely that the rich color left them, but she gave no other sign.

"If you have finished, you may go," she said, with unabated severity. "When you feel that you must make such speeches as this, seek me out and ask a private audience. But if you again utter such sentiments at a meeting of the council—or among your fellow workmen—you will be dealt with! I have been chosen your leader. I did not ask nor desire the position, but having accepted it, I will be obeyed!"

The Englishman drew the back of his hand across his forehead, to clear it of perspiration.

"Relieve me of my duty at the council, then," he said. "I cannot refrain from speaking when I hear the things you say."

"You can and you shall!" replied the woman, firmly. "I want you and you must remain. You must learn to curb your feelings. I will give you one more trial. If you succeed, I shall have much for you to do. If not, you know the penalty."

The irascible man hesitated a moment to take the hand which Ellen held out to him.

"What!" she cried. "Do you pause at the formula?"

He leaned over the hand and touched it with his lips. Then he began slowly:

"*As I regard and respect—*"

"Ah!" she exclaimed, impatiently.

"*The—commands—*"

She tried to withdraw the hand from him, but he held it fast and added, quickly:

"*Of the owner of this hand—may my comrades regard and respect me. As—I—*"

She snatched the hand from him.

"You need not finish a pledge," she said, severely, "that comes with such evident reluctance. I will have none but willing followers."

"Oh, Ellen!" he cried, in tones of unmistakeable meaning. "Why will you always misjudge me! You have no follower who values his life less than I! Words are empty things, but deeds will tell! When I am only impetuous you treat me as if I were a mutineer! I yield to no man or woman in my devotion to you, and I will try hard to give you no further offence. Let me—oh! let me—finish the obligation!"

She grudgingly allowed him to take the hand again, and he proceeded:

"*As I support my comrades, under her direction, so may they support me. My liberty or my life shall be at her pleasure if I fail in any respect in my duty.*"

The acrimoniousness had all disappeared from his tone and manner. He uttered the words with the devout appreciation of a Roman Catholic at the Christian altar.

"Your vow is accepted," said Ellen, solemnly evidently as a part of the same strange ceremony.

Then they proceeded to the door together, Converse extinguishing the solitary light

"You have little faith in me," he said, sadly, as they passed out.

"No," she answered. "I am sorry to say it, but henceforth it rests with you to strengthen that faith Good-night."

"Good-night."

Hugh Mayfield was waiting at the corner, as Ellen knew he would be, and the two friends strolled together toward her home.

"You are unhappy," said Hugh, after waiting some time to allow her to speak first. "Is it because of Converse?"

She turned her beautiful eyes upon her companion.

"No, Hugh, it is because of myself. I have need of strength. He talked of knives and dynamite, as he has done before."

"And you argued with him upon his folly, as you have always done?"

"Yes; I argued. I forbade him on the severest penalty ever speaking so again in open meeting. But that is not my worst trouble, Hugh. I not only heard his suggestions—*I listened to them!*"

The young man started as he perceived the deep meaning which Ellen gave to these words.

"You are nervous to-night," he said. "You do not mean that you embraced his theories. No, I am sure you did not do that!"

Ellen drew closer the arm she had passed through Mayfield's.

"*I listened to him*—a thing I never did before! His mother worked in a Manchester mill, and she used to go without her dinner in order to nurse him. She died when he was a very little boy. You know how he talks when he is excited. Well, he talked worse than ever

and I—*I listened.* Oh, Hugh! Could you not pray for me to-night? I need it very much."

He tried to laugh off her nervousness with an attempt at wit, saying he never prayed and never should until he saw some evidence that God intended to reform.

"Don't!" she whispered, looking up at the star-lit sky in a startled way "God cannot utterly have forgotten us. I know it sometimes seems as if he had, but it cannot be."

"The capitalists have built him a lot of fine churches lately," said Hugh, ironically, "and thus diverted his attention from poorer folks for awhile. I saw a statement the other day that Mr. Million, whose money is all invested in mill-stocks, had given $100,000 toward an elegant house of worship in New York. 'Generous man!' cried the newspapers, like a parcel of parrots. I'd like to get the Almighty's ear just one minute, to tell him that you and I, and old McNamara, and the widow Ransom's little invalid Maggie helped to earn that money, and that Mr. Million never contributed one cent of it!"

Ellen seemed too wrapped in thought to answer, and after a brief silence he added, "When are we to go to meet Mr. Westland?"

"Mr. Westland!" repeated Ellen, in a tone so loud as to astonish her companion.

"Why, yes. He is the agent now, you know."

"So he is," she said, slowly. "I had forgotten. I will set the time to-morrow."

The operatives in her room at the mill remarked the next day that there was an extra paleness on the face of the marchioness, and an extra calmness, too; but they did not know the reason.

CHAPTER VII.

A DRESSMAKER'S APPRENTICE.

Of course Ralph told Westland of the non-success of his attempt to secure the hand of his cousin, Miss Edna Melbourg. There was very little indeed that he did not tell his ex-guardian and present trustee. He related the full particulars of the conversation that they had in their ride out toward Harlem, and all about the visit that Edna afterwards took to Nathalie.

The little French girl, he told Philip, had been much impressed by the affair, and had even gone the next day to a Jesuit father for confession and absolution; but as the latter depended on a promise to abandon her lover she came home without it. The outward forms of her faith had always been observed by the girl. On a Friday she would have swallowed arsenic as soon as meat, and on certain saints' days she never missed attendance at the church services. She nearly broke with Ralph one night when he ridiculed her because she persisted in counting her beads longer than usual before coming to bed. She had two or three images and a small crucifix, which money could not have bought. When Ralph taxed her with inconsistency, she retorted that such a criticism came with poor grace from a heretic who had never knelt to the Virgin, nor partaken of a single communion. All of these things he told to Westland, who laughed at them, not because he cared particularly, one way or the other, but because it was his normal condition to be good-natured.

"So Edna refused you," he smiled. "I very much

fear you did not use due tact in coming to the point. Asking a woman in marriage is very much like buying a piece of real estate, I imagine. I have heard, too, it seems to me, that they do not always say what they mean. You had best wait awhile and try again."

"Oh, Edna meant it fast enough," he replied. "But that is not the worst of it. I don't want her any more than she wants me. I got a little dazzled at the thirty-thousand-a-year, but the minute I got my foot in it I was sorry. If she had accepted me, I don't know what I should have done!"

This announcement amused Westland more than anything that had preceded it. Ralph had such a helpless look as he recounted his narrow escape, that the trustee laughed aloud.

"You are good for the blues, my boy," he said. "I think I must get you to go down to Riverfall with me for a week or two. There is going to be a great upheaval there, I expect, and I shall need some one to keep me in spirits. I am living all alone in the big agency building, with no one to speak to except the corporation servants. During business hours I find it all right, but the evenings are lonesome. Say, Ralph, will you come?"

The young man hesitated.

"Could I—"

"No, of course not," said his friend, guessing without much difficulty the question he was about to ask. "What could you do with a girl like Nathalie in Riverfall? Take her to the Agency? That would look well, wouldn't it! Board her out? The whole village would be talking in twenty-four hours, and the 'White Caps' might visit you. Can't you leave your sweetheart, just for a few days?"

Ralph looked lugubrious.

"Oh, yes, I *can*," he said. "I don't like to, though. It

must be deuced dull in Riverfall, and Nathalie would help out wonderfully."

"It won't be so dull when the strike begins," replied Westland. "On the contrary, it may be too d——d lively. I think the biggest struggle ever known in this country is just ahead of us. The operatives are led by a young woman of superior capabilities, whom they will obey like a regiment of soldiers. On the other hand, the directors have given me full powers, and I shall use them."

The young man listened with awakening interest.

"If there is to be a row I certainly wish to see it," said he. "But, an idea has just struck me. If these people are so thoroughly under the control of this woman, isn't there an easier way than a shut-down? Wouldn't it be cheaper to pay her to give her followers a little sensible advice? That has been worked successfully elsewhere."

"You never have seen Ellen, or you would not suggest that," was the serious answer. "I would as soon think of trying to bribe St. Peter to let me pass the gates of Heaven. She has an object higher than mere personal gain. Mistaken as she undoubtedly is, her earnestness admits of no question. She and a committee of the 'mill-hands' are to meet me to-morrow evening. You would find it worth your while to be there."

Ralph thought a moment.

"I could run down for a couple of days, at any rate," said he, "and then, if necessary, I could return. I'll go and see what Nathalie says."

Nathalie sat at one of the windows in her little suite of apartments, idly drumming on the pane with her fingers. When Ralph entered the room she did not move or turn her head; but when he crept softly to her side and laid

his cheek to hers she threw her arms, with an impulsive motion, about his neck. Then, as if betrayed into too deep an expression of affection, she drew back a little, and surveyed his face with a very pretty frown.

"Where have you been so long? You told me you would stay but a few minutes."

"Long!" echoed her admirer, taking out his watch. "It is exactly three hours since I left this room. Are you not able to spare me for three hours?"

"Ah! But you said a 'few minutes'," she pouted. "If you had said 'three hours' I should have known what to expect."

He smiled into her face.

"And so you want the exact truth, do you? Well listen to me. To-morrow I am going away for two whole weeks!"

She started violently, and then sat blinking at him with a dazed expression. Presently her eyes filled with tears.

"You do not mean it!" she gasped. "Where could you go for two whole weeks? There is no place that it takes two weeks to go to. I must go with you, wherever it is. Two—weeks!"

He was so pleased at the evidence that she cared so dearly for him that he could hardly contain himself. It is pleasant to be loved very much indeed, when one is twenty-two.

"It is only a little way," said he, "only to Riverfall, but you cannot come. I am invited to Mr. Westland's house—the mill Agency—and there is no place for little girls like you."

Then he tried to make her understand all about the impending strike and his desire to please "Phil;" also,

how impossible it was that she could become a member of the party. But the girl refused to be reconciled.

"How can you men pretend to love us and yet use us as you do?" she cried. "We are good enough to kiss and hug; we can be petted and called pretty names when it suits you; but if we want to go to any place where people will see us, 'Oh, no! that is impossible!' I am tired of it! I would rather go back to Mme. Meliere's and sew on dresses. If you go for two weeks you may as well say 'Good-by.' You will not find me here when you return."

Ralph had heard similar threats so often that he did not place too much reliance upon them, but the possibility that they might some day be carried out gave him a certain alarm. He did not know what he could do without Nathalie. She seemed as much a part of his existence as his eyes or his hands. He did wish her more reasonable, but he preferred her with all her whims to the awful vacancy that her absence would create. He began to say that he would give up the proposed trip, if it was so distasteful to her. To this she made answer that he could do as he liked; that it made no difference to her whatever; that she was tired of a lover who always wanted to leave her; and that he might as well go now and have done with it.

In this strain the French girl talked until she had Ralph half distracted.

"I wish you would not say such silly things!" he exclaimed. "You know nothing can ever part us!"

"I am not saying silly things," was her answer, and a determined look came to the pretty mouth. "You may go to Riverfall—of course you have a right to go wherever you please—but you will not find me here when you

return. Go! I do not want you any more. I am very tired of you!"

She went to the bed, threw herself upon it, and hid her face in the pillow. At this, Ralph began to get angry, too. He spoke to her several times and, when she would not answer, cried, dramatically, "Good-by, then; I'm going, Nathalie!" put on his hat and left the house.

The French girl heard his steps as he passed down the staircase. She lifted her head and laughed quietly. It was so jolly to make him cross! He always brought home a new bracelet or ring to make up with. The farce had been enacted twenty times before, with substantially the same ending in each case. She went to a window and peeped out of a corner of a curtain upon the street. There he was, walking away as if he never meant to return, without one backward look. The dear fellow—how she loved him! When he came in, she would redouble her caresses. He ought to have known she was only in fun. Leave Ralph! It was inconceivable!

She looked at him again. He was turning a corner and walked like a man who had made up his mind.

Mon Dieu! If he could have believed her in earnest!

Soon the girl crouched on the floor beside the window and began to cry. It was cruel of Ralph to treat her so, when she had been so good and kind to him! She thought of her life at Mme. Meliere's—the plain food with ordinaire at dinner, the hard bed in the attic. It all seemed well enough at the time, but she did not like the idea of going back to it. No, she would not go there. She would accept any work, no matter how poor, before she would let those girls laugh at her.

An hour passed, and still she crouched by the window. Then a knock was heard at the door.

"Come in!" she called, without rising.

The door opened and a young woman in elegant attire entered. It was the sweetheart of young Astorfelt, Miss Annie May. Nathalie had worked herself into such a state that even the pride she would ordinarily have felt before this crushing creature did not come to her rescue.

"Why, Nathalie, what is the matter?"

The French girl began to cry again.

"He's left me!" she blubbered.

"Left you!" cried Annie May. "Again! How many times this month does it make? What an awful baby you are! Say, get up and tell me how you like my new dress. Stunning, don't you think so?" She posed before a long mirror, turning in every direction to get the best effects. "Cost two hundred dollars. I saw the bill. Is it too short in front? Sometimes I think it is and sometimes I can't tell for sure. Of course I want to show my low shoes and robin's eggs. How's that for a trail? I got out at Twenty-seventh street and walked by the St. James and Hoffman, just to see the dudes stare! Ha, ha! It was better than a circus!" She turned about again, pressing the dress-skirt closer to her limbs. "I believe it *is* a little too short, even for the street."

Nathalie rose to her knees and took a critical observation.

"No, Annie; it's just right. I wouldn't alter it an inch."

"I'm awful glad!" cried Annie May, much relieved. "You were a dressmaker's girl, you know, and your judgment ought to be good in such matters. I never can tell about a dress, but if it was a bonnet I wouldn't have to ask anybody. I trimmed for two years—only, for goodness' sake! don't mention it before Astorfelt—he would fall dead! He is always talking of 'low people who work for a living.' I rather think he imagines I left a

palace to live with him. He makes me sick! Does Ralph ever talk that way?"

Nathalie had risen to her feet. In her friend's flow of language she had for the moment forgotten her troubles. Thus reminded of them her tears broke out afresh.

"I know he'll never come back!" she sobbed. "It was not like any of the other times. I was cross and wouldn't speak to him and he just said 'Good-by' and went. No, he never talked high about the poor. He knew all about the place where I used to work. We met in a café concert. Oh, he's been so good to me, and now I'll never see him again!"

Annie May's only reply to these sentences, which came jerkily from a quivering mouth, was to laugh boisterously.

"Well, you are the worst baby!" she said good-humoredly. "One would think Ralph was the only man in the world, to hear you run on. Now, only yesterday, Astorfelt told me his friend Vanderschmidt, who is just out of college, was looking for a girl. He is richer than mud and will give her everything she wants and a hundred dollars a week of spending money beside. He wants something young. How old are you?"

"Seventeen," sobbed Nathalie.

"Just his figure. Now, dry your eyes, put on your best clothes, get into my carriage and I will take you to see him. I'll wager he'll give you double what you get from Ralph."

Annie May glanced with careless contempt around the apartment. Women of her class, as used the former slaves of the Southern states, often reckon their own station by that of their masters.

"Come," she continued, as the girl did not move. "Are you going? You'll never get a better chance. He

is stylish, handsome, pleasant and rich. You and I will have lots of fun together. We will get taken to the theatre every evening and to a wine supper afterwards. We'll ride behind the best horses that pass the park gates. We'll clean out Tiffany's. We'll—"

She paused; for Nathalie, far from going into raptures at the glowing description of the delights in store for her, had opened a little medallion that hung from a chain about her neck and seemed lost in contemplation of the picture that adorned its interior. Suddenly she lifted it to her lips and kissed it lovingly.

"No, Ralph," she said, in a low tone, more to herself than her companion, "I shall never love any man but you. This picture"—here she looked up—"is worth more to me than all the rich lovers in the world!"

Annie May laughed louder than before.

"My dear," she said, "that's not professional. It would be worth a great deal in its proper place, but it's wasted on me. Get your things on. I will assist you. I want you to catch Vanderschmidt before some other beauty has a chance. Of course, if you don't like him, or if you can't agree on terms, you needn't stay."

Nathalie kissed the picture again.

"I am not fooling, Annie. I do not want him. All my love now is in this little picture."

She kissed it again and her friend began to believe she meant it.

"If Ralph does not come back, what good will that picture do you?" asked she, mockingly. "Will it buy you a dinner or settle your laundry bill?"

A look came into Nathalie's face that neither Annie May nor any one else ever saw there before.

"Listen," she said softly. "Ralph is the only lover I have ever had. If he returns I will be very good to him

If he does not, no man shall take his place. I shall go to work. Yes, you may laugh all you please. I am not a good girl; I know that; but I cannot go from lover to lover. Ralph's money was not what tempted me here. I loved him the moment I saw him coming into the doorway of that Bowery café. I did not tell him so—we cannot tell men such things—they would soon become unbearable. When he asked me to live with him I could not refuse. If he had not been worth a dollar it would have been the same."

Annie May pursed up her mouth with an expression that might have meant almost anything.

"You are a little fool," she said, kindly, "but how should you know any better? Go and try your work again and see how it pleases you. Put on rough shoes and a calico dress and prick your fingers with needles. Don't forget, though, to pack your good clothes and jewelry where you can reach them easily, for the pawnshop will have them, one by one. When you are tired of it, if you have any good looks left, come to me and I will find you a market. Not a Vanderschmidt—you will be past that—but some old Dutch grocer or English brewer. To-day you are as pretty as a fairy and you have refused the greatest chance in New York. Seventeen! I would give anything to be seventeen. With your baby ways I would make my fortune. I am twenty-three! Oh, they never worship us after our teens are past! Come here and let me kiss you."

Nathalie submitted to the embrace, with unchanged gravity of countenance.

"Are you still decided?" asked Annie May. "You will not let me take you to the handsome young millionaire?"

"No."

"Well, good-by."

"Good-by."

Nathalie when she was alone, began to pack things into her trunk. She had so many things and the trunks filled up so fast! Every article she touched suggested the lover who had left her. Tears fell slowly as she proceeded. She held one pair of slippers in her hand for several minutes. They had long since been discarded for newer ones, but she would not have sold them for their weight in gold. They were the first pair he ever bought her. She remembered the evening he tried them on—it was the second night after she came—and the shoemaker's boy had to run back three times before he got a pair small enough.

"Such a baby's foot!" he had exclaimed, kissing the tinted stocking. And now the baby feet were going away from him!

Every dress had its history, each piece of jewelry could tell its little story if it but had a tongue. Some he had scolded about buying, but he said so many things no one could tell how much he meant. She recalled how cross he looked once at a bill of $225 for lingerie, and his subsequent assertion that one filmy chemise which she displayed upon her lovely person was worth more than the entire sum. She folded that in with the rest. None of these garments were suitable for the sphere from whence she came and to which she was about to return.

There was a servant who kept the rooms in order. More than one was not needed in a family whose only meal at home was the French rolls and coffee served in bed at eight or nine in the morning. Marie had gone out for the day and Nathalie was glad of it. The trunks could be taken away before she returned and that would

be better than explanations. The landlord would know where to get his rent and Marie was always paid far in advance. Her demands for money were endless; the visits of a very tall policeman and her want of funds being strikingly contemporaneous.

Nathalie worked away, until at last every article that could be jammed into her trunks had been packed. Then she prepared herself for the street, so as to notify an expressman. But where should she send them? Until now she had not thought of that.

As she debated the important question of her next domicile she thought of Ralph's blind cousin, the lady who had called and talked to her so nicely. "If you are ever in trouble come to me," she had said. Yes, she would leave a note at Mr. Westland's office, as the lady had advised her.

She took out her writing materials and indited the following note. She wrote a fairly good hand, but her orthography was a little peculiar.

"Deer Ladie:

"You arsked me to rite you in case i was in trubble. I have fell out with Ralf and want sum good plais to work. Do you no of ennything i could do? I will work hard and be good. I want know more luvvers.

"NATHALIE.

"Leev yure anser at Mr. Westland's and i will call for it."

She read the note over carefully, placed it in an envelope, and then tried again to decide where she had best go till she could find work. She opened the medallion and looked longingly at the picture. So absorbed was she in this occupation that she did not hear the door

open nor realize that another person was in the room until she felt an arm stealing around her neck. Thoroughly startled, she sprang to her feet with a scream. Then, seeing the intruder was Ralph, she threw herself into his arms, crying:

"Oh, how you frightened me! I thought it was Mr Vanderschmidt!"

"Vanderschmidt!" echoed Ralph, holding her away from him and looking very dark. "You were going to leave me for him!" he added, as his eyes fell on the full trunks. "This is the woman I have been breaking my heart over!"

"No, no!" cried the girl, clinging to him hysterically. "I thought you had gone for good. Annie May came and tried to get me to go to see Mr. Vanderschmidt, but I would not. She said he would give me all the money I would take, but I did not want him! I have been so miserable! I thought I should never see you again!"

Ralph did not look satisfied. He had a deep suspicion that the girl was acting a part and until he had more evidence on the subject he did not propose to rest content with her mere assertions. As he thought the matter over, his eye lit on the letter she had just finished and he reached over and took it in his hand.

"Oh, please don't read that!" she cried, trying to take it from him.

For the first time since he had known her, he pushed the girl aside with no gentle motion. He wanted to see on what terms she had sold herself to his rival. He tore open the envelope and devoured the missive, but it was all Greek to him.

"Nathalie," he said, roughly, taking her by the wrists, "what does this mean? To whom were you going to send this letter?"

"To your cousin," she answered, weeping at his violence, no less than at the pleasure of seeing him again. "She made me promise to write, if I was ever in need of a friend."

He released her and read the note again. "I will work hard and be good. I want know more luvvers." The words sounded honest. He turned again to Nathalie, who stood with her eyes still brimming.

"You were going to work!"

"Yes."

"At what?"

"Anything."

"And you preferred that to living with Vanderschmidt! Why?"

"I don't like to tell," she stammered.

"But you must tell."

"I—I can't."

"You must!"

"Well," she said, slowly, averting her eyes and placing one of her tiny hands against his breast, "it was because—oh! I wish you wouldn't make me say it!—because I—loved—*you!*"

If it was acting, it was marvellously done, he thought; better than Judic or Theo or Rehan. In a second more they were in a close embrace.

"And you thought I would never come back to you!"

She nodded very fast, while a child's smile shone through the glistening drops in her eyes.

"How could I do that?" he said, tenderly.

"You said 'Good-by,'" she whispered.

"But you were provoking!"

She held up her mouth for him to kiss, which did very well for an answer to that.

"I've got everything fixed," he cried, suddenly, "and

you can go to Riverfall! Only you cannot be with me. I shall live at the Agency with Phil, and my blind cousin is going, too. I have talked it all over with her this afternoon and we have arranged a fine plan."

The girl's face, which had brightened wonderfully at his first words, clouded very much as he proceeded.

"Not be with you! I don't understand."

"You have long wanted to be useful," he explained, "and now you will have a chance. Your best things are all packed away and you will leave them here in your trunks. Tomorrow you will buy a lot of ordinary clothes and go down to Riverfall and get work in one of the mills of the Great Central Corporation. You won't get much pay, but that will make no difference. There will be a strike there within a month, I feel sure. You will strike with the rest and, in fact, fall in with whatever they do. A woman they call Ellen is leader of the whole gang. Hire a room, if possible, in the same house with her and get her confidence. My cousin and I wish to know all that is going on, as it may be of much service to Phil, who I believe is going to have his hands full. You understand? You are to become a 'mill-girl' for a few weeks. I will arrange some plan of communication, so you can keep me posted. Will you do it?"

Nathalie was in the mood to do anything to please Ralph and readily assented. They discussed the details until a late hour and she seemed at last to thoroughly comprehend the part she was to play.

"Don't forget yourself for a moment, or you are lost!" was his final adjuration. "You will be likely to see me often—in the mills or on the street—but you must not bow or even wink at me. You could not mistake my writing. Unless I send you word, be sure you do not budge"

"And after tonight I sha'n't get a kiss for weeks, perhaps?" said Nathalie, thoughtfully.

"No."

"Then let's make the most of the time we have," she suggested, archly.

And they did.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SLAVE AND THE MASTER.

"Instead of discussing the labor question with you this evening, supposing I tell you a story?"

The speaker was the Marchioness of Riverfall and the listener was Philip Westland, agent of the Great Central Corporation. The time was evening and the place the rooms of the Marchioness, in the corporation lodging-house.

Westland nodded gravely. He sat so near the Marchioness that he could distinctly perceive the effect of the magnetism that she possessed, apart from any merely mental experience. They were alone.

"This is my story," said Ellen:

There was once a large island, owned by a great and beneficent Proprietor. Its surface was covered with ample fields, forests and vineyards. Beneath its soil was hidden every mineral known to man. Countless herds of cattle fed in its broad pastures. Innumerable fish clove the waters of its pelucid streams. Fruits grew in abundance in a thousand orchards. There was nothing wanting in nature to make it an earthly paradise.

A traveller, weak and helpless with his journey, moored his frail bark in one of the magnificent harbors which dotted the island's shores. He was faint with hunger and his form was destitute of even the merest apology for raiment. As his eyes rested upon the goodly land a smile lit up his wan features. "Here is warmth, food, rest and comfort!" he cried as he stepped upon the shore. As he left it, the craft in which he had made his voyage receded from him. Like himself it was of slender workmanship. The waves soon engulfed it and he saw it no more.

Toiling slowly up the village street, the traveler came to a dwelling. Everything about the place betokened wealth. The grounds were laid out in exquisite taste, and evidently under the eye of a true landscape artist. The lofty portal stood invitingly open. A glance at the spacious hallway showed that the owner was a man of taste as well as means.

The stranger confidently made his way to the door of this mansion and lifted the knocker twice. A well-kept servant answered the summons, but drew back with unconcealed aversion when he noted the poverty-stricken appearance of the intruder. "How dare you invade these grounds!" he cried, threateningly. "Begone, or I will call the dogs and set them on you!" The stranger's lip trembled, but he did not move. "Be kind enough to tell your master that I wish to speak to him," he said. His dignified manner awed the servant into compliance with the request, though it did not convince him that all was as it should be, and, muttering his indignation, he departed.

But when the master of the house appeared he assumed an expression no more cordial than that which his servant had shown. This the stranger noticed, but

he was not therefore disheartened. He relied upon the superior quality of mind which a master should possess over a servant, and proceeded with his tale. "Sir," he said, "I am a voyager to this island from a place far distant. An hour ago I landed upon your shores. The frail bark in which I sailed broke in pieces in your harbor, and even if it had not done so I could not return whence I came, knowing not the way thither nor having the means of sustenance on my journey. I am rejoiced to find you here in the midst of plenty. My wants are few and I pray you to supply them out of your abundance. When I have eaten and drunk and been given suitable clothing, of which you will observe I stand in sore need, I would like to have you set apart for me a little piece of ground in one of your vast meadows, on which, by my own labor, I can thenceforth secure my livelihood

On hearing these words the master of the house turned to his servant in great alarm. "Hasten to call the police!" he exclaimed. "This is certainly an insane person, who should be apprehended without delay!" When the servant had gone in search of the officers the traveller said to the master, "I am at a loss how to account for this reception. I am not of unsound mind, as my quiet demeanor and sensible discourse must convince you. I have committed no crime and know not of any offence for which I can be imprisoned by the authorities of this place, unless it is my poverty, and for that I surely cannot be blamed." "Poverty!" cried the master of the house. "Know you not that under our code that is the chief of crimes? If you confess to being guilty of it, the judges will make short work of you!"

At this juncture the island police arrived, and they haled the stranger before the magistrates On hearing

the statements of his accuser the judges were about to order sentence, when the traveller inquired whether he might not be heard in his own defence. To this it was answered that he had already admitted himself guilty of the crime alleged—an admission which his personal appearance made almost unnecessary—and the time of the court was too valuable to be wasted in useless harangues. After consulting among themselves they decided, however, that if he would engage to be brief, they would listen to anything he had to offer in extenuation of his fault. Thus permitted, he asked them first to tell him who was the Lord Proprietor of the island upon which he had trespassed. When he heard the name, his countenance brightened and he said, "By what right do you who are tenants here claim possession?" The judges told him they were all of kin to the Proprietor. "Then I have an equal right here," he cried, joyfully, "for I also am of His family!"

But the magistrates, wearied with his persistency, told him sharply that kinship to the Proprietor was not the sole requisite to possession of estates on the island; that all the land had been taken by the immigrants who first landed, and was still held either by their descendants or by other persons who had accumulated wealth and purchased titles from them. "The first settlers," explained the judges, "found here a wild people, whom they partly exterminated and partly drove into the interior, after which they divided all the island among themselves." "And these wild people, were they not of kin to our great Proprietor?" asked the stranger. "They claim to be distantly related," said the judges, not without confusion. "Then," said the traveller, "I protest against these titles, which are, by your own confession, written in blood with the points of daggers on parchment

made of human skin! I have as good a right to the land here as these pretended leaseholders, and I demand that my share be allotted me!"

The magistrates were thrown into disorder by this proposal and they consulted together for some moments. Then one of the oldest of their number stated with some severity that the point presented by the prisoner had been raised from time to time in previous years and had always been decided adversely by the island courts. The peace and harmony of the residents demanded that these rulings should still be maintained, and it ill became a new-comer who brought neither gold nor goods to question the established customs of his betters. This speech having been delivered and received with applause by the spectators whom curiosity had brought to the court-room, the magistrates sentenced the prisoner to be for an indefinite period the bond-servant of the man at whose instance he had been arrested, at the same time warning him that any attempt to escape the servitude would be severely punished.

Grieved at what he considered the injustice of his fate, but at a loss how to evade it, the slave, with what grace he could summon, entered the service of his master. Being apt and intelligent, he soon found special favor without seeking it, and his tasks were limited to those of the more agreeable kind. One day the master, who had grown to have a great liking for the slave, discoursed unto him in this fashion:

"Why art thou discouraged at thy lot, O slave! It will be easy for thee to rise above it, if thou wilt only avail thyself of the opportunities that are around thee. Thou esteemest me one of the favored ones, and yet my ancestors were not of the first comers to this island. My grandfather came like thee naked and hungry, and was

in like manner sentenced to servitude in the interest of the public weal. But he was not one of those who can be long cast down, and he early sought means for his lawful deliverance. He soon obtained leave to labor beyond the hours assigned him. He lived for years on the coarsest food and wore the plainest raiment that he might put aside the meagre sums that such denial brought him. At night he lay on a pallet of straw. When his fellow slaves made merry, he refused all invitations to join them. When they had their weddings and feastings he retired to his garret to count his gold. Little by little his savings increased. When he had a sufficient surplus he lent to others who could give him good security, charging the very highest rates of interest. By the time he was forty years old he could no longer be called poor. He had purchased his freedom. Then he obtained possession of a tract of land on which he had lent but a small part of its value. The previous holder had a large family, the care and education of which took all of his means and forced him to relinquish his rights. On this land my grandfather discovered coal deposits of surprising extent. They were especially valuable as there was no other coal mine within a long distance. A severe winter came on, very opportunely, for thou must know this island is not one of perpetual summer. There was much distress among the indigent and my grandfather found that he could get four times the ordinary price for his fuel. When spring returned he was a rich man, and could hold up his head among any of his neighbors. He was subsequently elected to positions of honor, and one of the most aristocratic of his fellow townsmen gave him his daughter's hand in marriage."

The slave's lip curled disdainfully as he replied:

of the few will give way to the rights of the many! Prepare for that day, lest you perish in the upheaval that will surely come!"

The master waxed wroth at this and said, "Dost thou threaten me, O slave! Thou, the bondman of my possession! Severely shalt thine insolence be requited thee!" At that he summoned certain other slaves—fellows whose good-will he retained by feeding and clothing them better than their mates—and at his bidding they bound the presumptuous man and cast him into a dungeon. But his words had been overheard and his doctrines spread broadcast among the people. His dungeon was soon filled with yet other slaves who had rebelled against their task-masters. One night a thousand of them rent their chains, overpowered their servile guards and took possession of the town. The oppressed on every hand rallied to their standard, and to-day that fair island is the happy and equal home of all the inhabitants thereof. The stranger cast upon its shores is welcomed. He is allotted a house and land enough to sustain him. If he is weak, he is cared for as tenderly as a brother. In return he gives of his labor what is necessary to provide his share of the things needed, and no more. Masters, with leagues of woods and fields that they could never use have disappeared. Slaves have disappeared, too. Committees, chosen by popular vote, distribute the abundance of the land to all alike. No one is naked, no one is hungry. No man hoards bread and fuel while thousands starve and freeze. And the Great Proprietor, when He comes, will find his kinsmen with their arms about each other's necks in friendly union, where or re they either used or bore the lash and gyves!

CHAPTER IX

"IT MAY MEAN MOTHERHOOD."

It was a strange picture. Philip Westland, the mill-agent, the representative of Capital, dressed irreproachably, sitting in the mill-girl's scantily-furnished room, turning his intellectual face toward her, and listening with the most marked attention to every word of her allegory. Ellen, in her calico gown, clothed with a beauty of countenance seldom seen in the drawing-rooms of the rich, motherless by death and fatherless by the law, reciting her story in an impressive manner, bending toward her auditor and piercing him with eyes that flashed a hundred lights as she proceeded. The floor of the chamber was bare with the exception of several ordinary mats, and the exceedingly cheap furniture was far from modern. The cages of the canaries were covered with old newspapers, in order that the rays of the common kerosene lamp might not disturb their little occupants. A few starch boxes filled with flowers, and a half dozen pictures tacked to the walls constituted the only attempts at ornament. Yet Philip Westland felt a charm in that place for which he could give no satisfactory reason. He loved to hear those clear tones, to feel the magnetic effect of that presence, to look into those orbs which gleamed with a radiance he had never seen before.

They could not well have been farther apart in social life—these twain—but each found in the other an unaccountable attraction. When Ellen finished her story he waited a little while before breaking the silence that fell upon the chamber. There was a pleasure in the very

stillness that succeeded the reverberations of her voice. She leaned back in her chair and rested her eyes upon the floor. There was no attempt to apply the moral of the tale. If it had made any impression upon him, the effect would be evident in time, and Ellen had learned to wait.

"Has this wonderful island a geographical location?" was his first question.

"Yes," she answered. "On the maps it is called AMERICA."

"And the date of the overturn—"

"Already it has begun. Within twenty years it will be substantially complete."

"Indeed! And the strangers who arrive—"

"Are from the vast Unknown," she said, solemnly. "I mind me of one who floated into Riverfall last night. The roof that shelters it, the food it eats, must be repaid with slavery by-and-by. Poor little thing! It did not ask to be brought here, and it cannot return whence it came. When it grows older, it will have two dismal choices; either to toil on till the grave receives its exhausted body, or rise from its natural condition by crushing numbers of other slaves yet deeper in the mire. Small wonder is it that between such fearful alternatives so many take the latter. Human nature is weak. The hard conditions under which we live blot out the finer sentiments and transform us into brutes. I have heard that in the South, before the war, manumitted negroes often bought other slaves and became the most tyrannical of masters. Superintendents who passed through the greatest privations in their youth are notoriously the hardest upon the unfortunates over whom they are placed in the mills. Prairie wolves make speedy banquets on

their disabled brethren, and men are very much like them."

He listened with grave attention.

"Learned men," he said, "have a theory that the constant struggle which has been going on for the rewards of wealth during sixty centuries is the greatest of the factors that has brought our race out of barbarism; that the extreme disagreeableness of poverty has induced mankind to attempt its escape by all possible means, and that the world has thus been a gainer in the impetus given to the sciences and arts. There is also a law of nature that has been named the 'survival of the fittest.'"

She bent her eyes upon him until he wondered their fire did not scorch his face.

"Out of barbarism!" she repeated, with the utmost accent of scorn. "Whom has it brought out of barbarism? It has given ease and refinement to the few, but the many are still fighting for the means to exist—fighting their self-constituted masters and their unhappy fellow-sufferers, in the madness that necessity engenders! Cast your glance over Riverfall. You will see a dozen palaces and a thousand huts. Where one person knows the comforts and luxuries of life, a hundred are familiar with want. Everywhere you will find the same thing—idleness supported by industry, non-producers fed by producers. Who are 'the fittest?' Does any man dare say *I* am inferior in natural endowments to those silly daughters of wealth who every day cover me with the dust of their carriages as I walk home from work?"

He hastened to reassure her.

"No, Ellen, *you* are not; and I say this in all honesty, and not from any wish to flatter you. There is no need of *your* remaining in this sphere. A hundred better opportunities are before you if you will take them. But of

the mass of the workpeople as much cannot be said. They are fit for manual labor, and nothing else."

She did not take her eyes from him.

"And who made them so?" she queried, impressively. "Do you pretend that workpeople are a separate race from their employers, and incapable of improvement? Why, the workman of to-day is the employer of to-morrow! The son of the employer of yesterday is the workman of to-day! Equitable laws would do away with these intolerable differences. If I possess the superior qualities with which you credit me, shall I therefore desert my less fortunate brothers, and league myself with their oppressors! Shall I not rather remain in their ranks, encouraging them to strive for the better time to come? If we rise we will rise together. If we fall, you will find me with the weaker ones."

He asked her what changes she would like to inaugurate.

"First, State and municipal control of all staples. I would not let one irresponsible man—for the sake of increasing a pile of money already too great for his needs—raise the price of meats or cereals. Every mineral in the soil of America belongs by right to the whole people. I would not allow a narrow combination to corner them, and compel each user to pay it an exorbitant tribute. I would not let the greed of a railroad company stand between the Kansas farmer who burns the corn he cannot sell and the Massachusetts artisan who is pinched with hunger. I would make transportation over National highways the duty and prerogative of government. Beef that sells at two cents a pound in Colorado should no longer cost fifteen cents in New York. I would destroy the present business system, which drains the life-blood of the poor, and increases the number of millions

aires. No man has a moral right to any more of this world's goods than he can use. I would not let him place his parchment over a single rood of earth merely to gratify his desire for possession. I would provide each child with a home and sustenance as good as that of any other child. It should receive the best possible education at the public expense, and under no circumstances should it leave its books in order to earn its bread."

"A beautiful dream!" murmured Westland. "And how would you bring it about?"

In her enthusiasm, Ellen unconsciously moved her chair closer. She almost touched him, and he could feel, even more than before, the strength of her personality.

"Nothing is wanting," she said, "but the consent of the majority, and when our theories are understood that consent will not be long withheld. At the present time, the working masses are undoubtedly struggling in ignorance, but thousands of them are groping for the light which they feel is just beyond their prison-house. There are those who will lead them. The system of wage slavery has not crushed out all the manhood and womanhood in their ranks. There are still a few who will reject the always ready offers to link themselves with the 'upper classes,' and behind the jasper walls of Paradise forget the souls still lingering in Purgatory. America is governed by laws; we will gradually shape them to the great end we seek. There is enough for all, if each is given a just share, and we will aim at a more equitable distribution. The workingman is thinking. He is learning to use the most potent weapon ever placed in his hand—the ballot."

Westland contemplated the "mill-girl" for some seconds without speaking. He would have been satis-

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fied to sit there for an indefinite time in perfect silence The charm increased as the hours flew by. But a guilty consciousness stole over him. He knew it was the woman herself and not her arguments that impressed him, and he felt that it was unfair to her to take her time for his mere selfish pleasure. He wondered again that she should devote her life to people so far beneath her in intellectual attributes, though she had already answered his suggestion that she was fitted for higher things. Misled and mistaken, she had, like other fanatics, the greatest tenacity of purpose. Thus reflecting, he became aware that she was waiting for him to speak.

"You have read much," he ventured.

"Not so very much on these subjects," she answered. "A few books that Hugh brought me did more to solidify the opinions I already held than to give me new ones. I am not an educated woman, as must be apparent to you. At twelve years I had to leave the common school to work for the corporation. The wages they pay have hardly enabled me to attend a seminary," she added, with no trace of bitterness, and even with a smile. "And I do not mean that I spend all I earn on myself, either." She blushed at what might seem to him like a boast. "There are so many in want around me that the pennies go as fast as they come."

There was nothing romantic in the surroundings, yet he hated to depart. The kerosene lamp began to smoke, and the wick had to be adjusted. The oil was growing low in its receptacle. He knew it must be past eleven o'clock, and that the mill wheels would begin to turn in seven hours more. She needed her rest, and there might also be an impropriety in his remaining with her so late. And still he lingered. He wanted to hear her voice a little longer. But he knew that it was c

wholly selfish wish, and with an effort he mastered it at last.

"It is almost midnight," he said, looking at his gold repeater. "I beg your pardon for trespassing so long upon your patience. I quite forgot the flight of time in listening to you."

There was an honest, straightforward ring in Ellen's voice as she replied:

"There is no need whatever of haste. An hour more or less of rest means nothing to me."

"But," he said, slowly, "does the hour at which your visitor leaves mean nothing? Is Riverfall as free from the tendency to gossip as that would imply?"

He was immediately sorry he had said it, when he saw the look that came into the face of the Marchioness.

"There is no person in Riverfall who would dare question either my acts or my purposes," she said, with deepening color. "At least, none of my own class, and I care little—perhaps too little—for the opinion of the other. They know to what my entire life is dedicated, as absolutely as that of a nun to her Order. I come and go as I choose, at all hours, and I never yet was molested. I have too high a mission to allow me to dwell on trifles. As long as I have breath, my every thought shall be devoted to the elevation of the Common People."

Why did he ask the next question? It was clearly impertinent.

"You never intend to marry, then?"

She started at the word.

"Marry?" He thought there was a cry of lonesomeness in her tone. "If marriage only meant to marry, I might some day consent to be a wife, that state to which I fully believe God has called every woman of physical and intellectual vigor. But marriage may mean

motherhood! It may mean the calling into life of children, to suffer as these others suffer that I see about me! I have much courage, but I could not endure the awful responsibility that comes with parentage, in these dark days, to the poor. Almost every week some young girl comes here with a happy light in her eyes, and a secret for Ellen on her lips. She has been asked to marry. She tells me who the young man is and asks my advice—really my consent—to wed him. What can I say? I dread the future that is in store for her—for him—for the unborn whom they may summon into this world that has been made a hell by the inhumanity of man. I look into her face. Love has electrified it, and made the desert of her cheerless life to blossom as the rose. Her passion is a noble one, a God-given sentiment, perhaps the greatest and best among His innumerable gifts. She has a right to a husband's embrace, a right to press her own babe to her breast. Who shall deny her? Surely not I.

"But the years pass on. The husband's wages make a scanty living for two, though they contrive to exist with economy. Then the baby comes—oh, how soon he seems to come!—and the expenses increase. Before long I see the little mother at the mill gate in the morning with the rest of us—'just to help out for a little while'—but she keeps on. Two years more and another comes. That period in which a woman is entitled to have rest and peace, by all that is sacred, she spends, almost to her latest moment, amid the crash and jar of the mill. Then we miss her for a few weeks. With two children to care for and a husband's meals to get, her whole time will certainly be needed at home. But here she is again—pale, weak, only half recovered from her trial—at her loom. More mouths to feed make greater necessity for labor

An endless chain has entangled her limbs and she will never escape its folds! I have seen it so often; and yet when the next girl comes, with the same happy smile, to tell me the same story, I give her my blessing and see her swallowed in the same maelstrom!

"There are immoral girls in Riverfall; girls who might have been, under other conditions, true and honored wives. The young men do not marry as freely as they used. They think of the future, and dare not undertake the risks that matrimony brings. Illicit relations are formed as a matter of course. You cannot dam up a river so that the stream will not find its way to the valley. Cases that almost break my heart are being constantly brought to my attention. I am full of sympathy for these girls, though I set my teeth together when I think of the System that is responsible for their acts. I often take one of them by the hand, on my way home at night, to prove to all that they are Ellen's friends, a sure passport to respect among their fellow-workers. The crimes that follow these moral lapses are frequently too dreadful to relate. Little souls are stilled on the threshold of existence. The last time the water was drawn from the great reservoir there were found—Hugh tells me—twenty-seven little bodies! 'What cruel mothers!' you will exclaim. 'What a cruel System!' I will reply, that stifles the best feelings of our nature, and nourishes the baser ones until they overbalance the rest!"

He rose slowly and then stood looking into Ellen's eyes. She rose also.

"You believe me an honest man," said he. "Otherwise you would not talk to me in this manner."

"I believe you intend to be," she corrected, the old smile returning.

"I have my duty to perform as I understand it," he con-

inued, earnestly. Then he placed a hand upon her shoulder, quite unconscious of what he was doing, and she made no movement of objection. "Ellen, I honor and esteem you most highly. What I am compelled to do in the interest of those whose trusts have been delegated to me may strain our friendship, but I trust we shall not let it break. The tension is likely to be severe, for after you and your committee left us this afternoon we voted unanimously to enforce the new scale of wages."

She did not move an inch, nor evince the least surprise.

"I expected that," she answered, laconically.

"We believe we are right," he proceeded, slowly, "and shall act accordingly. A theory is one thing, but a fact is another. When the universal brotherhood of man arrives we shall all be glad to welcome it, I have no doubt. At present I see only the thing that confronts me. At the price of cotton and of cotton fabrics a certain scale of wages is necessary to produce such a dividend as these mills should earn. That scale has been adopted. I hope —I can hardly say I expect—the spinners and weavers will quietly accept it. If they do, I promise to do all in my power to effect an increase at the earliest moment the state of the market will permit. If they prefer to go out and leave the looms idle, the swallows may build their nests beneath the eaves undisturbed for the next twelve months."

Ellen listened gravely, but still with no demonstration. When he finished, she said:

"You are speaking now not as Philip Westland, but as mill-agent and trustee."

"As mill-agent and trustee," he assented. "I can speak in no other way."

She bade him a cheerful "Good-night," and he walked pensively along the deserted streets to the Agency

Upon reaching his chamber he threw himself into an arm-chair and relapsed into deep thought.

An hour later he found himself staring at his reflection in the mirror opposite. The image had such a threatening aspect that he shrank from encountering it. He turned this way and that in his chair to avoid its gaze, which seemed a mixture of reproachfulness and anger. When he could no longer endure the accusing figure in silence, he sprang up and confronted it with a show of boldness.

"You would do the same if you had taken an oath!" he cried to his counterfeit. "I am under the orders of a board of directors. If there be blame, it is theirs as well as mine!"

Then he went to bed, but he rested very ill that night.

CHAPTER X.

ARE YOU A CAPITALIST?

There were crowds in the streets of Riverfall. Men and women with discontented faces thronged the sidewalks. The mills were deserted. Not a wheel revolved; not a spindle whirled. On the great gate of each mill was the legend, in large black type, "CLOSED BY ORDER OF THE DIRECTORS." And some wag had added on one of them, "AFTER ALL THE HANDS HAD GONE OUT!"

It might have been Sunday, it was so quiet, but the holiday attire and the gaiety was missing. Conversation took on a lower tone. Little groups here and there dis-

"It seems to me that your grandfather was one of the greatest villains of whom I have ever heard. I cannot conceive a malignity which could induce a man who had himself known the sting of poverty to become such an oppressor of his unfortunate neighbors. Having become comfortably rich it should have been his greatest delight to give the coal, which cost him nothing, freely to all who needed it. How could he sleep at night for thinking how grudgingly these poor people were using their fuel, on account of its cost, when by a word he could heap every fireplace high with warmth and gladness! Undoubtedly women sat shivering day after day within sight of his monster coal heaps; little children died, perhaps, for lack of sufficient heat; aged men's days may have been cut short because of the severity of the atmosphere! It is incredible that such a wretch could have been elevated to office, or that any man of reputation could have consented that such blood should be mixed with his!"

The master heard the slave with patience and then answered:

"Indeed it is all truth, as I have related it to thee. My grandfather became so rich from his coal mine (and afterwards by buying up all the flour on the island and thus doubling the price of bread) that he built at his own expense the beautiful church you have seen in the centre of the town, besides giving a large sum to the fund for sending missionaries to the benighted inhabitants of heathen lands. When he died, seven ministers assisted at the obsequies. If you enter the church which he built you will find it adorned with inscriptions relating to his munificence and piety. His son, (my father) succeeded to his estate, and I have succeeded to him. Thus thou seest how, through the business ability and foresight of my

grandfather, his descendants are raised above the necessity of toil, and may continue so, if they choose, till the end of time. Merely by the natural course of accumulation our property will increase vastly with each generation. I have added to the acres possessed by my father and my son, I trust, will add as much more. Thou hast unusual capabilities, O slave! It is for thee also to rise, if thou wilt but seek the means, above thy serfdom."

Then the slave rent his clothes and spat upon the earth in his wrath.

"May my right arm fall lifeless at my side and my nether limbs refuse their office," cried he, "if ever I attempt to climb thus to ease upon the necks of my fellows! Each person on this island is a kinsman of the Lord Proprietor, who will surely come one day and demand an account of the manner ye have used His benefits! Here is abundance of all things that men need; wherefore should one man spread himself over miles of territory, to the exclusion of others equally deserving? You have counseled me to habits of industry, and dwelt upon the merit of long hours of toil; but it is evident that if each person did his proper share of work three hours a day would suffice to gather the products of nature and weave all the fabrics of commerce. You urge me to be frugal; but the prodigal soil, hardly yet touched by the husbandman, laughs at your niggardliness. You say to me, 'If you would prosper be celibate;' but no other creature that God has made deigns to set me the example. Shall all the moving things but man have their breakfasts provided, and he, their proud superior, who arrogates to himself all rights, here and hereafter, suffer from hunger? Not so, O my master! The time is at hand when Equity shall rule—when Justice shall sit on the throne long occupied by Fraud—when the privileges

drew some rather warm criticism upon himself in the latter operation by tumbling her hair down in his eagerness. When he had kissed her until she compelled him to discontinue, he seated himself by her side and began to ply her with questions.

"In the first place, what villain told you I was a capitalist?"

"One of the men named Converse," she answered, twisting her hair back into shape, and speaking with her mouth full of pins that she had drawn from the tangled meshes. "I think he would kill every capitalist in the world, if he had his way. Ellen has an awful lot of trouble with him."

"Tell me all about her," said he, showing sudden interest.

"Oh! You ought to know her!" cried Nathalie. "She is the most wonderful woman I ever saw. All the mill people do exactly as she tells them. The night after I first began work I was taken to a hall and made to promise—but I forgot! I was not to tell that!"

Nathalie bore a perfectly childlike look as she made the discovery that she was breaking her obligation. Her eyes were opened wider than Ralph had ever seen them before.

"It will be all right to tell *me*," he said, "for of course I would let it go no farther. That is what you came here for, you know, and I want to hear every word."

The girl looked unconvinced.

"But, Ralph, I promised not to tell—and—and a promise is—a—a promise."

It was evidently useless to pursue this tack, and he no longer insisted.

"How did you like the mill work?" he inquired, by way of diversion.

"Splendid!" was the unexpected reply. "I was dreadful sorry when the strike began, though there is some fun in that, too."

"You are rooming at the same house with Ellen, I hear."

"M—m," she assented. "I've got a room on the same floor, just across the hallway. It's the jolliest place! I sleep with a girl named Flaherty, and if I start up suddenly in the night—dreaming of you, or anything—I bump my head against the low ceiling that comes down on my side of the bed."

Ralph frowned at the recital.

"And that is what you call 'jolly!'" he said, with a grimace. "A month ago you thought our ten-foot chambers too low for you. Now you like your head-breaker better. Probably," he added, as the thought struck him, "you prefer the Flaherty to me, also!"

Nathalie laughed at this.

"How could I?" she said. "Bridget is only a girl, anyway. She has got a brother, though, named Mike. Oh, *he's* an angel!"

The disgusted expression did not leave the face of Mr. Ralph Melbourg.

"Horrible!" he ejaculated. "I suppose the next thing I hear you will be Mrs. Mike Flaherty!"

"Well, he's asked me," she replied, thoughtfully.

Ralph grasped her wrists so tightly that she uttered an expression of pain.

"You shall not speak to me in that way!" he exclaimed.

She pulled her hands away, as soon as he would let her, and moved her chair from him.

"I shall do as I please," she said. "If a good fellow wants me for a wife I shall not wait for *your* consent.

Ellen has been talking to me lately, and what she said has set me to thinking."

Her sober face struck a great chill into her companion.

"Anyone can talk to you except me and you will listen to them," he said, reproachfully. "You know I love you above everything."

Nathalie observed him gravely.

"You would not marry me."

He flushed suddenly.

"It is the first time any one ever proposed to me," he said, "and I—"

The girl arose and began to put on her wraps.

"It is not the first time you have insulted me," she said, quietly, "but it will be the last."

This speech alarmed him.

"My darling," he hastened to say, "when you talk of going with another man you make me desperate. This fortnight we have been separated seems a year. Is it really true that Flaherty asked you to marry him?"

She bowed firmly.

"After knowing you less than two weeks?"

"Yes."

"What kind of a fellow is he—a rough mill laborer I suppose?"

"He is a Christian," she answered, simply.

"By which you mean a Roman Catholic."

"It is the only true church," said she. "He would not make fun of religion, as you do."

He was growing very uneasy.

"But—you do not love him! Tell me, Nathalie, that you do not!"

"I do not love him," she repeated; and he caught her in his arms.

"And you *do* love me!"

"And I *do* love you."

He could hardly contain himself for joy.

"But why do you say such disagreeable things?"

She laughed and seemed quite contented again.

"It is you who are cross," she said. "You looked as if you were going to bite me when I said the ceiling was low in my bedroom. Do you think I am to blame for it? I have done exactly as you told me."

"I surely did not tell you to sleep with Miss Flaherty," he smiled, "nor to flirt with her brother."

She laughed again.

"I had to sleep with somebody, and I couldn't take my choice. There are rats in the house, so I wouldn't sleep alone, anyway. One jumped out of my shoe this morning, as I was going to put it on. As for Mike, I didn't flirt with him at all. I couldn't help him asking me, though it *was* rather sudden."

Then he got her to talking about Ellen; and she told him again what a wonderful woman she was, and how everybody obeyed her as if she were a queen. She spoke of Hugh also, and of Converse, the Manchester fire-eater.

"When he spoke of you as a *capitalist*, he almost frightened me," she said. "I could not bear to think of you as one of those men who get rich by robbing the poor! You'll never do that, will you? If you do, I could never love you again."

"And now, what do you say about the strike?" he asked. "Will they hold out long, do you think?"

The question seemed to astound her.

"Of course they will!" she cried. "They will never give up—I heard them say so, over and over, in the great meeting, last night! The mill owners will either have to pay the old wages, or keep their mills closed

What makes your friend Westland do their dirty work for them? I thought him a nice sort of man."

Here was news worth having, from undoubtedly honest sources.

"What do they say about Phil?" he queried.

"They don't say very much about him—Ellen won't let them. She likes him, and that is what nobody seems to understand. He is the agent who has locked us all out, but Ellen tries to stop all talk against him. I think that will make trouble before we get through. Converse is the worst about it. It was when he was talking on that subject that he used your name."

"What did he say?"

"He was standing on the sidewalk with a big crowd and he said something like this: 'I ain't going to have a woman's love affair spoil this strike without a protest.' Then the people around him said 'Hush!' and looked frightened. 'I don't care,' he went on. 'He's brought a young capitalist cub with him, too (that's you, Ralph), and got him up at the big house, along with a lady who has got a fortune made out of poor operatives like us But he can do anything he likes, of course, and we mustn't say a word, because he's Ellen's lover!' Then some of the men offered to strike him—they were awfu mad—and Hugh (do you know Hugh?) came up just in time. When they told Hugh what Converse had said he looked as black as any of them for a minute; but finally he told us to go off as quietly as we could, and not say a word about it to any one. We all promised, and—there! —I've been and told you another secret!"

Ralph's face, which had grown rather lengthy at the uncomplimentary allusion to himself, grew brighter as it encountered the disconsolate look on hers.

"It will do no harm, though," the girl continued,

ingenuously. "You are on our side against the capitalists, even if you do live in the house with the agent I wish you would join our society. They couldn't say any more against you after that!"

"What society?"

"The Sons and Daughters of Toil," she replied, with absolute sincerity.

"I fear I am hardly eligible,' he replied, his smile broadening. "I have never labored very much, you know."

"They took *me*," said she. "I joined a week ago, and I know they would be glad to have you. Let me take your name in. I would be delighted if I might."

Ralph had the greatest difficulty to preserve his countenance at all.

"Not quite yet," he said. "I want to look into the matter a little before I apply for admission. But tell me what Ellen said to you. You didn't tell her about *me*, of course."

Nathalie grew serious.

"I told her there was—somebody," she said, reddening. "I couldn't help it. She got it out of me before I knew it. You can't keep anything from Ellen."

"Supposing she should ask you if you were in Riverfall on false pretences?"

The girl's color deepened.

"If I came here that way," she said, "it is over. Now I am with Ellen as fully as any of them. Not a striker will hold out longer than I. I have never been happier than since I began to earn an honest living."

His face grew very long again.

"And where does all this leave me?"

"Oh, Ralph!" she cried, impetuously, "I wish you were also very poor—that you had to work, and that we were

like these people I see about me! I am glad you are not a capitalist," (she spoke the disagreeable words with bated breath) but you are nearly as bad. You do not earn anything. The workpeople are your slaves, after all. Ellen says no man has a right to live if he does not produce things. If you and I could work together, it would make us love each other all the more."

The tear that glistened in the girl's eye as she finished gave her a new charm in the sight of her lover. It was not like the Nathalie he had known so long, but there was nothing displeasing in this revelation of a deeper nature. When he answered he was as serious as she.

"It is not nice to be poor, Nathalie. A few weeks such as you are passing may seem pleasant, but in the long run poverty must be very painful. The man who camps with enjoyment in one of the bright summer months, would find it quite another thing when the blasts of winter sweep across the plain. Don't let Ellen put silly ideas into that pretty head of yours."

She was vexed at such an allusion to her new idol.

"Ellen could not have silly ideas," she said, "but perhaps I don't quite understand all she says. I am sure, though, if you were poor, I should like you just the same; and think you would seem nearer to me."

He regarded her with an expression of great tenderness.

"I am poorer already than you suppose," he said. "One or two more strikes and lock-outs, and I may have to look for work in earnest."

"Oh, I am so glad!" was her answer.

She seemed so happy that he hesitated to disturb the illusion, and changed the subject.

"My cousin, the blind lady, wished to see you when you came. May I call her?"

"Oh, yes! I should like to see her very much!"

When Ralph found Edna she expressed a desire to have a few minutes' private conversation with the girl, and, after escorting her to the room, he withdrew.

Nathalie met her visitor half way, and the mutual greeting was very hearty. After a few words in the ordinary fashion, Edna said, suddenly:

"Tell me about this Ellen. Is she very handsome?"

"I think I never saw a woman so beautiful!"

There was a strained attention to each word that was not lost on the French girl.

"Is she deeply in love, do you think?"

"They say—the strikers—that she cares very much for him."

"Describe him to me, please."

Nathalie looked thoroughly puzzled.

"You have known him much longer than I, madam."

"Known him?" repeated Edna, slowly. "Why, I have heard his voice but once. That was when the strikers' committee met the directors."

Nathalie's surprised expression grew more pronounced.

"And you never knew him before you came to Riverfall?"

"Certainly not. How could I?"

"Ralph knew him so well and spoke of him so often, I supposed you were also acquainted. Well, I will do the best I can. He is quite tall, with dark hair and eyes. He is a gentleman in looks every inch, but with a manner that seems at times very stern. He always dresses well, but with no attempt at display—"

Edna interrupted her with an expression of impatience.

"Dresses well! He cannot dress well when at work

in the mill! What do you mean? I am sure you are not describing Mr. Mayfield."

Nathalie started.

"Mr. Mayfield! you said nothing about him. You asked me for a description of the man the people say is Ellen's lover."

"*Yes!*" It was almost a scream. "Is not his name Hugh Mayfield?"

"Why, no; it is Mr. Westland."

The blind girl lurched forward, and Nathalie caught her in her arms. The apparently harmless statement had thrown her into a dead faint.

CHAPTER XI.

THE AGENT'S CONSTABLE.

"Bill" Converse was out of sorts. The strike had endured nearly a month, and there was no sign that an end was near at hand. In spite of all he could say—and he grew less and less guarded in his utterances—most of the ex-employes of the Great Central Corporation still pinned their faith to Ellen in what he considered the blindest manner. The situation galled him. He had been in many strikes before, but never in one like this. To see two thousand persons thrown out of their livelihood and not a hand raised to resist the injury; to see men taking orders at such a time—and such orders—from a woman, was more than he could bear. Converse was in a very dangerous mood that day when he

made the allusion to Ellen which Nathalie reported to Ralph. The rough treatment that his associates were evidently about to give him did not improve his temper. He knew that Hugh's interference was all that prevented his falling a victim to the anger he had evoked by his slighting reference to the Marchioness of Riverfall.

There were half-a-dozen of the men who sympathized with Converse, though none other dared be so outspoken. They were all of them Englishmen. When Hugh had given him safe escort out of the crowd, these men joined him, and the party proceeded to his room in one of the corporation houses. As they were going up the stairs they saw a man nailing a paper on Converse's door. It was a brief warning, couched in legal phrase, that he must vacate the premises within one week from date.

The Manchester weaver turned savagely upon the man, when he had read the notice, and would have struck him but for the interference of his comrades.

"You devil's cur!" he cried, in a towering passion. "Meaner than the hounds who employ you to do their rascally business! Who sent you here with this paper? Speak, or I will spoil your ugly face so that your master will not recognize it!"

"It was the agent's constable," whimpered the fellow, thoroughly scared. "I didn't know there was any harm in it. I have a wife and five children at home, sir, and I have to do something to get them bread!"

Converse's eyes were like those of a tiger as he replied:

"*You* have a wife and children! What about the wives and children you are dispossessing this day? To feed your brats you would be willing to starve a hundred others! To keep a roof over their heads you would throw a thousand people into the street! Give

me those papers—give them to me, I say, or I will force them down your throat! There! Tell your employer to look in the river for them, and that if he sends more they will be used in the same way!"

The bundle of documents floated down the stream, into which they had been flung from the window, andthe tool of Capital fled from the vicinity, glad that he had been allowed to escape so easily. Before half an hour had elapsed all Riverfall knew of the occurrence, and the first semblance of excitement began to show itself. The immediate result was the calling of the strikers' committee of conference to meet that evening. At the very moment when Nathalie was removing her veil in the reception-room of the Agency. Ellen was holding the most important session of the month at the hall where the meetings of the committee were always carried on.

Her first act, after the usual opening formalities, was to demand of Converse whether it were true, as reported, that he had committed a breach of the rules by assaulting a representative of the law who was engaged in doing a legal act.

The Englishman had made up his mind to dissemble no longer, and he met the question with a bold defiance. The yoke of this woman had become insupportable. If his fellow-strikers were to continue to bow beneath it, he would leave their ranks, and the sooner the better.

"It is true, exactly as you have stated it," he said, without flinching. "I took the papers that ordered me out of my home, and threw them into the river. My only regret is that I did not throw Westland's man after them!"

Ellen spoke with calm resolution.

"It is evident that you have determined on insubordination, and, however painful it may be to me, I have

but one course to pursue. I have entered on a policy which your act may seriously imperil. It is for me to disown it without delay and the only way to do so is to strike your name from the books. This will be done."

Converse, though fully expecting the result, could not conceal the fact that it gave him an unpleasant sensation. He looked around the room, but in the faces that he encountered there was little to encourage him. Then he said, in a low voice:

"That it may never be said I submitted to this injustice without a protest, I appeal from your decision."

Mayfield took from the table drawer a number of slips of white paper, and passed them around among the group. For the next minute nothing but the movement of lead pencils could be heard. Three members who were designated to collect and count the ballots reported them as unanimous in favor of sustaining Ellen's action. At this announcement Converse took his hat and left the room without another word.

Old McNamara rose to say that, while he endorsed the expulsion of the disobedient member, he had a certain sympathy with the sentiment that had actuated him in his treatment of the constable's messenger.

"But," he added, "I do not forget that we have placed ourselves under certain officers, and given them authority to decide what course we shall follow. Unless we can obey our leaders, we can never hope to defeat our enemies. I confess I could wish we had made more progress, but I am trying to be patient. Converse is as good a man and as true a soul as there is in Riverfall. I hope none of us will treat him otherwise than as a friend when we meet him. He has been expelled from our committee, and further severity seems unnecessary."

The old man's words met with a general expression of

cussed the all-important question, but what was said could not have been detected many feet away.

Philip Westland, the new agent, could see part of the crowd from his window, though the Agency was some way from the center. Edna Melbourg and Ralph were with him. Edna, at frequent intervals, expressed an opinion that the strike could not last long. She had no difficulty in perceiving that the matter was preying on Philip's mind, and she wanted very much to encourage him. Ralph said little. He was thinking mournfully of the reduction in his income which another year's loss of dividends in the Great Central Corporation would entail. Westland listened listlessly until Edna had repeated her consoling sentences twenty times or so, and then spoke.

"This is no longer a strike; it is a lock-out. In a strike, the employes can return at their pleasure and resume work at the wages offered. In a lock-out, the manufacturer fixes not only the wages but the time when he will permit the hands to resume labor. The attitude we have taken puzzles our work-people. The ordinary way in a case of this kind is to attempt to put on new hands, who are subjected to all sorts of humiliation, if not direct assault, and are denominated 'scabs' and 'knobsticks.' This brings on a general conflict between employer and employe. In a lock-out, nothing of that kind can occur. The corporation, having decided to lock its doors, has no need to employ anybody. The locked-out people, having nothing to excite them to acts of violence, will the sooner tire of their amusement. Whenever we get ready to open the mills again, they will jam the entrance in their eagerness to reach the looms. But we shall be in no haste. A little longer vacation than usual will do these people good."

Ralph heard him attentively, and thought he meant all he said. Edna heard him with equal attention, and took a very different view.

On the second evening of the strike, a little figure, cloaked, hooded and veiled, crept to the rear door of the Agency and asked for Mr. Melbourg. As previous instructions to that effect had been given, the stranger was admitted and shown into the reception room. A few moments later Ralph entered. He made two steps to her side and would have clasped her in his arms, but she drew back.

"*Are you a capitalist?*"

Her voice was sepulchral After waiting for the question to have its full effect, she added:

"Because, if you are, you cannot touch me!"

Ralph laughed merrily, thinking it not a bad joke.

"Lift your veil, Nathalie," he said, "and I will draw from the deepest and best mine I own."

But she drew back again.

"You must answer me, Ralph. I am completely in earnest. *Are you a capitalist?*"

"Well, no, my darling," he answered, "I don't believe I am. I rather think I came near being one, but our friends the strikers have pretty well disposed of that peril."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" cried the French girl, throwing up her veil. "I love you very much, and I couldn't bear to think of giving you up, but I heard one of the men say you were a capitalist; and I couldn't have endured that, you know. Now, I'll take off my veil and—"

He caught her to his heart with one convulsive clasp. It had been two weeks since he had had an opportunity to speak to her. His quick fingers removed the screen from her face and the hood from her head, though he

ings will not hold half of us, should the proposed wholesale evictions be carried out. Even if the authorities were disposed in our favor—which they are not—there would be a limit to what they could do in that direction."

"The people will not all be turned out at once," replied Ellen. "It will take time to serve the notices. The problem will be forced on the town officials gradually, and they will be compelled to meet it. And if a night comes when they cannot give shelter to all the helpless, we will apply to the churches."

Hugh's lip, in spite of all he could do, curled ironically at the suggestion.

"The churches!" he exclaimed. "When was ever a church on the side of a striker! Who ever heard a parson preach from his pulpit against our destroyers! They will lock their doors, Ellen. Place no reliance on them, for they will fail you."

She was not disconcerted by his lack of faith.

"There have been reasons heretofore," she said, calmly, "why the churches have not sided with the oppressed in times of labor troubles. Violent men have led the strikers on to acts of lawlessness, and the church is the great conservator of the peace. It is largely for the sake of enlisting the active sympathy of this immense force that I have held so firmly to the policy of non-resistance. We shall present a new phase of this question—a set of peaceable work-people ordered out of their homes. They cannot refuse us shelter in edifices dedicated to the service of Him who said the giving of a cup of water to a thirsty man would not be forgotten in Heaven."

The young man listened with reverend mien, but his

regard was toward the speaker and not the institution of which she spoke.

"Oh, Ellen," he said, "I wish I had your faith! Your own heart is so guileless that you look for too much good in others. The church has always leagued itself against the poor, in favor of the rich. For a thousand years it has poured its holy oil upon the heads of kings, and damned the subject who dared refuse to put his neck under the despot's heel! The Irish landlord has more than once invoked the aid of Rome to quiet his ragged and starving tenants. Pizzaro and Cortes destroyed better nations than their own, with the Cross uplifted above their bloody swords. Right here in Riverfall, the rich men rule every religious body. Go to New York and you will find the luxurious seats in the great churches filled by men who have cornered the necessaries of life, and draw dividends from watered stocks that compel starvation wages to such as we. Neither priest nor parson will risk his comfortable living by going contrary to the sentiments of his chiefest patrons. I am glad you are going to test this thing. It will be worth one night of suffering to show to the world what Nineteenth Century Christianity will do for houseless American citizens. If we were Zulus or Fiji Islanders I should have no fear; but we are unfortunate in our race and color."

"We will try them," said Ellen, simply. "If they fail us, that will be the time to discuss our next move. Have you heard of any more cases of extreme destitution?"

"Yes, there are several." He gave her a list which he took from his pocket. "But you must not try to do too much with your own means. You have no right to

deprive yourself of your last penny—money you have saved by the most stringent economy."

She smiled at his warning.

"You are not the one, Hugh, to lecture me on that score. I have heard what you have been doing without calling on the general fund. The little I have saved was put by for just such an occasion as this, and if I keep back any of it, I do so in fear of a greater need to come. Did you see the agent to-day?"

Her voice lost a little of its steadiness as she pronounced the words "the agent." Its tremor was not lost on Hugh.

"I saw him," he replied, "and said you entirely repudiated the act of assaulting his messenger. He said he was glad to hear it, and unless a second one was disturbed should take no steps to punish the infraction of law. The corporation, he told me, wish possession of all their property at the earliest possible moment. Unless there are indications within a short time that the ex-employes have undergone a radical change of sentiment, the entire plant will probably be turned into macaroni works, to be run by Italian labor. 'The mill-hands should see the impossibility of winning in this contest,' he said. 'There is no law to compel us to open the mills. If they wish work, why do they not try other towns. By remaining here they seem to set us at defiance. I can assure you that, unless our wheels revolve by the first day of November, the last ounce of cotton has been spun in Riverfall.'"

As Ellen heard him, the color mounted to her cheeks.

"And this is free America!" she exclaimed. "This is the land where the all-powerful ballot secures to the humblest citizen the right to dictate laws which shall control the highest! What hinders the son of labor

from taking peaceable possession of his own? He outnumbers the capitalist as the leaves of the forest outnumber the trees. He has nothing to do but to alter statute laws and State constitutions; and yet, like another Samson, he allows Delilah to shear him of his tresses! He labors like a willing slave for masters that rest in comfort. He wears fustian that they may be clothed in silk and velvet. He sleeps in a hovel—or, if they please to order it, in the open air—that they may press couches of down in frescoed chambers. He dines on common food, or, it may be, goes hungry, that they may taste the richest products of the earth. And this he does by deliberate choice, with the weapon of deliverance always within his grasp!"

Her companion was carried away, as he had often been before, by her fervor.

"Not by violence shall the end come!" she continued. "There is no need to shed a drop of blood, nor inflict a bruise. We will have neither the torch of the incendiary, nor the bullet of the assassin. Let us, who would invoke the law, show our respect for it. The autumn election is near at hand. In all labor centres we must urge the selection of our friends to seats at the State House. I have no vote—the capitalists have a well-grounded fear of what my sex would do in legislation—but you and such as you must be at work. The spectacle of two thousand workmen and their dependents, though willing to labor at half-decent wages, depending on public aid, ought to have a powerful effect on the choice of officials. With proper men in the House and Senate we can dictate terms to our late employers."

Hugh engaged to set about the work with vigor, and rose to take his departure.

"I heard that some of the men came very near as-

saulting Converse this morning," she said, at the door. "What was the matter? When I asked the little French girl across the hall, she told me he said something about me, but would not repeat the words."

Mayfield gazed earnestly into her eyes before he answered. She was very tired, and already had troubles enough to bear. But he knew Ellen so well, and he thought she ought to know. He made a quick decision, and told her the direct truth.

"Do you wish very much to hear it? He said Philip Westland was your lover."

The door opened and closed behind him. And Ellen stood there for a long time, with her hand pressed to her heart, wondering what could have hurt her so, and whether the pain would ever cease.

CHAPTER XII.

THE "MILL-HAND'S" ERRAND.

Philip Westland, Ralph and Edna Melbourg were taking breakfast in the cosily-appointed dining-room of the Agency. The agent was dividing his time between the edibles, his companions, and the Riverfall Daily News which he had folded and placed on the table in a position convenient for reading the latest comments on the labor situation. At times he would read a paragraph aloud, to the evident entertainment of his hearers. For example:

"The last of the eviction notices were served by the corporation constable yesterday. Next Monday those first notified will be expected to vacate, and all the corporation buildings will probably be tenantless before the following Saturday night. We do not learn of any real interference with the messenger who did the work, after the first day, though his ears must have tingled if he paid attention to the uncomplimentary remarks that greeted him on every side.

"The town authorities have been appealed to by a committee of the employes to provide shelter for the families as fast as they are turned out of doors, but, so far as is known, no action has been taken. The officials seem fearful of offending the agent of the corporation, and they are said to be in a quandary. If the town fails to do its duty and loss of life results, some one will have a heavy responsibility to answer for. A great corporation may be able to close the doors of five hundred dwellings to the men, women and children who have helped it to amass its millions, but there can be no excuse for the public officers if they neglect to take every means to care for the public wards.

"A News reporter interviewed Agent Westland yesterday, but found that gentleman in an uncommunicative mood. All he would say was that he was acting with the knowledge and approval of the board of directors. The late employes of the Great Central having left work voluntarily, and remained out for nearly six weeks, the corporation deemed itself justified in taking entire possession of its property. It was for those who had advised two thousand persons to quit the work which gave them a livelihood to counsel them in this emergency. The agent seemed to speak without the least temper, and said he was merely doing as any business man would under the same circumstances."

Westland looked up, after reading the last paragraph, and remarked:

"That reporter has succeeded very well in stating my views; much better than some of the Boston and New York men did. It is a plain business matter and nothing else. Why, there are not two sides to it. The houses are owned by the corporation, built for the purpose of accommodating their employes. When the people cease to serve the corporation, they ought to leave its buildings without waiting for a request. Can any one doubt that?"

He seemed to address his query to Ralph, who fidgetted in his chair before replying.

"I suppose it is all right, Phil, as you say," he said, "but there is something confounded unpleasant to me in an eviction. Here are hundreds of families given only seven days notice to get out of places they have for a long time been led to consider their homes. It is all right, of course, but—hang it!—it is not agreeable!"

The agent frowned a little at the picture.

"Every one of them," said he, "owes more than a month's rent. And every one could have had steady employment if he had chosen to listen to common sense instead of to—"

"Ellen?" suggested Ralph, as Westland paused for a word.

"To labor agitators," said the agent, supplying the needed syllables. "All of the inconveniences they may suffer they have brought upon themselves. They have still plenty of time to send a committee to me and offer to resume work at the revised schedule, before a soul of them is ousted from his tenement. But they won't do it. They have lost all reason, and seem to follow blindly everything suggested by—"

"Ellen," said Ralph again, to help him out.

Their leaders. If I were to give up to them now it would be equivalent to an admission that the work-people of this country are henceforth to rule the manufacturers. Their arrogance after that would become unbearable. It is the old question—begging your pardon, Edna—whether the tail shall wag the dog. Now, I will see every shuttle and bobbin buried a thousand feet beneath the soil of Riverfall before it shall ever be said that was done under my administration!"

He turned to Miss Melbourg.

"What do you think? You are strangely taciturn of late. Have you any new opinions on the situation?"

The blind girl was a little agitated at this unexpected question.

"It does seem hard, as Ralph says," was her reply, "to turn so many people into the street; but I have no doubt it is necessary, or you would not do it. Oh, yes, I am sure it must be!"

Westland had finished his repast, for which he did not have that morning his usual appetite. He pushed back his chair from the table, and spoke with earnestness.

"Here is my situation, Edna. I am trustee of your father's estate, which has $400,000 invested in the Great Central mills. I have a large part of my own means (though that is a minor consideration) in the same securities. By vote of the directors I have been ordered to crush this rising spirit of insubordination which attempts to dictate to us what wages we shall pay, regardless of the state of the market, or whether the men who furnish the capital are to have a penny of dividend. Were these workmen to meet us as individuals we should have no trouble. If a spinner asked for more pay and was refused, he could go elsewhere and our business would suffer no disturbance. But they have combined to resist us at every

point. Unless we take orders from them, out will go the entire parcel, and our mills must shut down until they take a notion to return. Socialist doctrines are spreading all over the country. Not only has the mill business been made precarious, but it is nothing uncommon for a strike to tie up the railroads, or suspend the production of a great staple like coal or iron. The capitalists must make a stand or they are ruined. In a few years, at the rate we have been going, we shall be liable to have our throats cut and the roofs burned over our heads, as at the servile insurrection in Hayti. There is literally no end to the demands of these so-called 'reformers.' I have watched them in several of the trades where they have gained a foothold, getting an inch this year and asking an ell next. The brickmasons that we employed on our last extension would only work eight hours a day, and the contractor informed me that he was paying them more for the eight hours than he used to give for ten. The carpenters quit at five o'clock each afternoon, no matter how much the work needed to be hastened. Why, even the newsboys and bootblacks are having their unions, with a ritual fit for a Scottish Rite chapter. Within six months I have walked down town because all the street car and 'L' road men were on strike, and a carriage could not be had for love or money. I believe the cooks and chambermaids will organize next. Backed by my directors, I propose to show the world one place where the capitalists decline to be trodden under foot. Proceeding to extremes is not pleasant, but it must be done. If a coachman peremptorily refused to drive my horses, I should not continue to keep him on my premises. And if not him, why these other people?"

As she made no answer, he added:

"You have something on your mind, Edna. What is it?"

A servant entered and announced:

"Mr. Hugh Mayfield."

The cousins arose to leave the room, but Westland stopped them.

"I would like to have you both remain, if you are willing. There can be no secrets between Hugh and me."

The invitation was accepted, and the party had assumed its former appearance when Hugh was ushered into the room. The "mill-hand" evinced slight surprise when he noted the presence of the agent's guests but, though no scion of wealth, he had the manners of a true gentleman, and responded politely to the introductions that followed. He had heard of the misfortune of Miss Melbourg, and the expression which he cast upon her was one of profound pity. But he did not long delay proceeding to the business that brought him to the Agency.

"Mr. Westland, some of the members of a committee which has been delegated to speak for all the late employes of your mills have asked me to put a question to you which I myself believe to be superfluous. To oblige them I have consented to ask it, though I am sure I can predict your answer. They wish to know if there is any possibility that the evictions will be delayed beyond the dates specified in the notices."

"No; not for an hour," was the calm reply.

"I thought so," said Hugh. "Now, there are not half a dozen empty houses in Riverfall that can be hired, were our people ever so able to pay rent, which—as you know—they are not. We have applied to the authorities for leave to use the public buildings, but they move slowly. It is thought they fear to offend you by [illegible]

friendly attitude toward us. The nights are cold, and daily growing colder. It would be uncomfortable, not to say dangerous, to remain out of doors in this weather. Should worse come to worst and we find ourselves in the streets in inclement weather, would the doors of your houses be closed against us?"

When he ceased, it seemed as if a feather falling on one of the velvet rugs would have jarred the building. Edna leaned forward in her chair with strained attention. Ralph seemed hardly to breathe. Then Westland's answer came out with that distinctness which one notes on the first frosty mornings of winter in the midst of pine woods.

"Hugh," he said, "for I will still call you by that name, in the old familiar fashion, the people of Riverfall are not children. All they have done and may do in reference to the present trouble are their deliberate acts. They need not have left the mills; they need not have so treated the Great Central Corporation—whose bread they have eaten for years—that the evictions became necessary. It is not I who am turning you out of doors, it is yourselves. Late as it is you could yet secure a reversal of the order by sending a committee here, not to argue, but to declare a desire to resume work. I have stayed here ever since the strike began, ready to treat with anybody who desired it, but not one person has been to me with a proposition. The friendly relations that existed between employers and employed have given place to those that govern beligerents."

Mayfield bowed gravely.

"Your reply is precisely what I expected and I will convey it to my associates."

"I should be glad," said Westland, hesitating for suitable words in which to couch the idea he had in mind.

"to make personal exceptions of yourself and Ellen to any of these rigors. This house is cordially open to both of you at any time."

Hugh's resolve to repress all evidences of impatience experienced a severe test, but he answered, quietly:

"What I have advised my comrades to endure will be good enough for me. As far as the proposition refers to Ellen, I will tell her of your offer."

Westland flushed violently.

"My intention was an honest one," he said, "but as her decision would undoubtedly be influenced by your own, I will ask you not to say anything to her on the subject. It is one of the unpleasant consequences of my position that I cannot divide my duty as an official from my feelings as a man and a friend."

"I might say—" began Hugh; and then he hesitated.

"Well?" asked Westland, encouragingly.

"I might say that I cannot conceive of a duty that should destroy one's sentiments as a man. Or, in other words, how a man of true sentiments could consent to accept an official position not in consonance with them."

He arose at that, bowed politely to Ralph and Edna, said his good-bys and was gone. Westland waited a long time for some one to speak, but he waited in vain. He made a poor assumption of cheerfulness, left his chair, lit a cigar and strolled out into the garden.

When he had been gone a little while Edna spoke:

"I suppose it is wrong, cousin, but my sympathies are very strongly excited for Mr. Mayfield's friends. I think Philip is right, as the law goes, but the result will be terrible. It is a case where one can hardly tell what to do, but of one thing we can be certain. There will be suffering before it is over, and the funds of the poor will run very low." She took out her purse. "Would you

approval, and the committee proceeded with its business. When the rest had left the hall, McNamara lingered to say another word for the expelled one.

"He means well, Ellen. I hope you won't be hard with him."

"I fear he will make us much trouble," she replied. "A few such acts as he was guilty of to-day might bring on a general conflict with the authorities. This is no time to encourage hot-headedness. My course will depend more on what he may do than on what he has done. We have at least disowned his breach of the law, and thus set ourselves right with the public."

The old man walked away, and Ellen and Hugh strolled, as was their wont, toward her home together. They said little, but when they reached her door she invited him in, feeling instinctively that there was something on his mind that he desired to impart to her. She lit a lamp, which made the canaries stir in their cages. When both were seated, Ellen turned to her companion a face in which were deeper lines than he had ever seen there before. She was bearing a double burden that overtaxed her strength.

"What is it, Hugh?"

The assumed cheerfulness of her manner did not deceive him.

"I hesitate to say much to you to-night," he replied, "because I see you are not as well as usual. Sleep will do you more good than talk. I will come in to-morrow."

"I am stronger than you think," was her answer, "and I shall sleep better when I know you have kept nothing from me."

Her superior force of will won the victory, and he proceeded:

"We have expelled Converse from the committee; that

was right. Any other course would have been fatal to discipline. But the thing that caused his outbreak is yet to be met. The notices ordering us to vacate the corporation houses will still be served. They are legal documents. We must either obey them quietly, or resist. Which shall it be?"

"Obey," was the prompt answer. "We cannot successfully compete with the law."

He bowed assent.

"But," he said, "what is to come next? It is not warm enough these nights to sleep out of doors. Women and children will perish if the sky is their only covering. They must be provided with shelter. Where?"

She thought a moment before she spoke.

"There are the public buildings," she said. "The same authorities who stand ready to enforce our eviction from the corporation houses are charged with the duty of providing food and shelter for the poor. There is no disgrace in accepting such aid at such a time. The stockholders who refuse to let us earn our bread in their mills are by far the largest taxpayers in Riverfall. Under the State laws we cannot be refused the necessaries of life. Those men who have covered the town with their title deeds will have the bills to pay, as they ought. When our people understand this—and you must see that the idea is circulated at once—they will no longer stand in dread of the word 'pauper.' The State has kept us in childhood. When its policy makes us hungry and homeless, let us go to it like children."

Hugh listened with the air of one who, while he intends obedience, holds the right to make suggestions.

"Let me remind you," he said, "that the town build-

we sleep to-night in the town buildings—or out of doors—we shall need such things as mattresses and bedding. I will give you a quantity of tags to mark such articles with their owners' names, so they will not get lost in the crush. If we find that we are short of these comforts when night comes, those of us who are young and strong will lend ours to the weaker ones."

Nathalie assented.

"Hugh and some of the men whom he has selected will see to the distributions, but the women must do most of the cooking. Certain kitchen utensils will therefore have to be reserved, and these must also be marked. All who are keeping house have agreed to give to the committee whatever is left in their pantries, for the general use. What money we have we shall make last as long as we can. When it is gone the town must aid us. It cannot let us starve."

After further conversation, in which more minute particulars were given, Nathalie went back to her own room to dress. Miss Flaherty had already arisen, and was engaged in packing her things for removal. Nathalie proceeded to do the same, and the two girls discussed the situation as they worked. Neither of them knew what to think of the prospect, but both had complete confidence in their leader. The ship on which they were about to embark had to them but one word on her—"Ellen."

By noon the last articles in the houses that were to be vacated that day had been taken out of doors. The constable who came at one o'clock to lock up and take the keys saw a strange sight along the sidewalk. Household goods were piled to the curbstones for many rods. Women and children, some on chairs, others on mattresses, were discussing the prospect for the next night's lodging

Frugal meals were being served in the most primitive style. Several of the little ones were crying dismally, as if from a foreknowledge that the evictions boded dreadful consequences to them. One or two aged grandams complained in a high key that they were taken from comfortable rooms and pitched like loads of coal into the gutter. But most of the dispossessed were strangely—almost suspiciously—passive. And so the constable reported, that afternoon, to Westland.

The agent did not, himself, go down town. He could imagine how things looked there without an ocular demonstration. He stayed at the Agency, thinking he might have a call from some committee or other body of citizens, and not wishing to be found away from his post. And he was not mistaken. About four o'clock his bell rang, and a moment later a servant entered the drawing-room to say that a delegation of his ex-employes was outside, and desired to see him.

"Ask them to come in," he said.

But the servant returned after delivering this request with the information that the delegation did not wish to enter, and would like to have him come to the door. A momentary suspicion of foul play crossed his mind, but he would not yield to it. Mastering his feelings, he arose and went out on the front piazza, where he found ten or twelve persons, among whom he noticed at the first glance Ellen and Hugh.

"My friends," he said, in a firm voice, "I am told that you wish to see me, and refuse to enter my house. I presume you are a committee of the ex-employes of the Great Central mills. If this be so, I would like to ask why you decline to confer with me in my office, where you and your associates have so often been for similar purposes?"

There was a pause, and all the other members of the committee looked to Ellen. When she raised her beautiful eyes to meet those of the agent, they affected him powerfully. For an instant his gaze was withdrawn from the group, and he lost his equanimity.

"Having been consigned, sir," she said, in her ordinary tone, but with deep earnestness, "to the streets of Riverfall, by the order of Agent Westland, we would not presume to intrude upon the floor of his home. If the outdoor air is good enough for us to spend the day in, it should suffice for the brief interview which we desire. By your direction nearly five hundred persons are houseless. Many of them are weak women and helpless children. A night in the open air would be injurious, possibly fatal, to some of them. The town authorities have not yet consented to allow us shelter. We have heard that their hesitation is from fear of offending so powerful a personage as yourself. We come to ask if Agent Westland has intimated a wish that the people of Riverfall shall find to-night not only their late homes but the public edifices closed against them?"

The agent had time to collect himself during this statement, and when he replied he spoke like a man of iron.

"Agent Westland does not understand by what right your committee assumes to question him. After your people had deserted their places in the mills for six weeks, after most of them were in arrears for over a month's rent, he asked possession of his houses. Not one of the men for whom you speak cared enough about retaining his home to come and seek the employment that has never yet been refused him. To-day part of the buildings have been given up to their owners, and, I am glad to learn, in a peaceable manner. Before the end of the week the rest will, I trust, be vacated. I am not as

official of your town, but only of the mill corporation, and my interest ceases when its commands are obeyed."

Ellen heard him without taking her eyes from his face.

"May we say to the town officials that Agent Westland does not object to their giving shelter to his ex-employes?"

He answered her without moving a muscle.

"I shall be here, as I have been for the past six weeks, ready to transact business with all comers. If your committee has any proper question to ask me in reference to the attitude of the Great Central Corporation, it will find me ready. But if the town authorities of Riverfall are in ignorance of their duty, which I should hesitate to believe, they must apply elsewhere than to me—either in person or by proxy—for the information."

As he closed, the faint sound of a shouting crowd came borne on the air from the direction of the railroad station, mingled, it seemed, with the just discernible beating of drums. The conference was suspended in the curiosity felt by all at this unexpected occurrence. Westland left the piazza, and accompanied the committee to the street, where they could see, first, a large number of boys, running backward and forward across the highway; then, a rush of people on both of the sidewalks; and then, in the middle of the street, a drum-corps and a body of militia—the entire party marching in their direction. A few minutes later several companies of soldiers were halted in front of the Agency by their commander, who immediately came toward Westland, and politely asked to see him in private.

The crowd, now numbering half the population of Riverfall, pressed forward to hear what was said. Westland spoke loud enough for all to understand.

"You can have no private conversation with me,

Colonel Caswell. If there is anything to be said to me, in the discharge of your duty, I hope every person here will have as good an opportunity to hear it as I."

A murmur of approval went through the vast assemblage. The mill agent was not a popular man in Riverfall that day, but still less so was the militia colonel. The sight of bayonets has exasperated many a peaceably-disposed crowd before now.

"I have been sent here," said Colonel Caswell, "by order of the Governor, upon the representation that the local police may not be able to protect the town and mill property during the next few days. I called my men together very hastily, and embarked on a special train. Arriving at the station I was advised to consult you, as representing the mills, in reference to the best points to place my companies."

All eyes were turned upon Westland, who responded, with dignity:

"I have no advice or suggestion to offer to you, colonel. As the presence here of your command was neither requested nor expected by me, you will have to look to those who sent for you. It may not be deemed gratuitous for me to say, however, that I am entirely unaware of any emergency that should make the police likely to require your assistance. The people here seem to me perfectly quiet and orderly. If they have been otherwise, the fact has not come under my observation."

Colonel Caswell bowed politely.

"My only mission," he said, "is to assist the local authorities in preserving the peace. If there is no need of my services I shall be all the better satisfied. I will now present myself to the town officials, if you will kindly direct me to them."

Westland gave the required direction, the drums be-

gan to sound again, and the colonel marched his men toward the village, with half the populace at their heels.

"Allow me to say, sir," said Ellen, facing the agent once more, "that I am very glad to learn you had no part in the perpetration of this outrage."

He answered, imperturbably:

"While I had nothing to do with it, I cannot agree with you in the term you use. I do not consider it an outrage upon a law-abiding people to have a body of citizen soldiery sent into their midst with no other mission than to see that the peace is preserved. It is only to those who either are or intend to be breakers of the law that the military is a menace. Now, before you go, let me say another word. There is yet time for the late employes of the Great Central Corporation to make overtures looking to resumption of work in its mills. Within three days, if you say the word, the hum of industry can be heard in the silent walls, and the empty corporation dwellings can again be filled with their tenants. The time in which this may be done is growing brief. In less than a fortnight the machinery will otherwise be removed, and the factories will be devoted to other uses. If you are determined to destroy Riverfall as a cloth manufacturing centre, you have only to persist in your course a very little longer. If you ever intend to bring back the town to its old prosperity, you will have to move in the matter without more delay."

Ellen's voice was as firm as ever when she replied:

"We left the Great Central mills because a rate of wages that barely sufficed to support existence was about to be reduced still lower. If the corporation could make such a cut as this, they could make another after that, and the end must come sometime."

"Permit me to ask in what respect you have bettered

yourselves?" was his quiet comment. "You say you had low wages. Admitted, for argument's sake. But what have you now? You had roofs over your heads, food in your larders, money coming to you each pay-day. You have exchanged these—for what?"

"For manhood and womanhood!" cried the girl, with feeling. "We were never created for slavery! The blood in our veins is as good as that in those of our late masters! Our bonds were unendurable and, like the negro who fled from his cabin and rations into the swamps of Georgia or Virginia, we prefer death, if need be, to chattelhood! Mark me, Agent Westland! The spectacle of these poor people, driven out of doors in October by the corporation whose wealth they have trebled, will have its effect throughout the length of America! The bondman will rouse himself and cast off the yoke that such men as you have placed upon him! The slow brain of the giant Labor is awakening. He will not long suffer himself to be led in chains by the dwarf Capital. When he turns, let us hope that in his fury he does not quite crush the life out of his oppressor! Let us hope that he will show a magnanimity that was never shown to him! He has the power; all he lacks is the intelligence, and before long that will be his. We have bowed the knee in the past; we have sued for terms; soon we will dictate them. It may be that some of us who stand here will not see the day, but it is coming. The dawn of it can be plainly discerned in the East. The Brotherhood of Man will soon be more than the mere dream of enthusiasts. It will become a glorious reality!"

She turned and, followed by Hugh, McNamara and the rest, went slowly toward the village. There was a momentary cry of disappointment when she reported to the

waiters there the poor result of her mission, but no voice plead for capitulation when she related the agent's proposition for a resumption of work at the cut rates. After a brief consultation, it was settled that Ellen and Hugh should make a visit to the town officials, and once more demand shelter for the houseless ones. They took their way accordingly to the residence of the chairman of the board, and were about to pass into the yard when they were stopped at the gate by a soldier, who barred the way with his musket.

"Halt!" he said.

They halted, and Hugh, somewhat astonished, stated their desire to see Chairman Hunt. The soldier called one of his companions, who took the message to the door of the residence. The callers now saw that there were at least a dozen militiamen in the yard, apparently guarding the house on all sides. In a short time Chairman Hunt appeared, looking much disturbed.

"How do you do?" he said, in a shaking voice, "What can I do for you?"

"It is almost sundown," replied Hugh, who by Ellen's request had agreed to act as spokesman. "There are nearly five hundred people out of doors in Riverfall. If they are to be sheltered for the night, which seems likely to be a cold one, no time should be lost. We appeal to you again, as the representative of the citizens, to open the public buildings."

Chairman Hunt cleared his throat several times before he could answer. Something seemed to stick there.

"My associates," he said, at last, "at our meeting this afternoon, thought we had no—no right—to put the town buildings to—to such a purpose. They—the buildings—have recently been painted and repaired at much expense

They—they are not suited to the purpose of a—a lodging house."

Hugh heard him with impatience.

"And you will let women and children sleep in the streets?" he said.

"There is yet time," faltered the chairman, "to see the agent and get back into his houses—"

"At his terms?" interrupted Hugh, with set teeth.

"Yes—at his terms." assented Mr. Hunt, eagerly. "You could—"

"You will refuse to let us in, even if we freeze to death? Is that your final decision?" Hugh broke in, sharply.

"We—we thought best not," stammered the chairman.

The pair left the yard without another word. As they were walking away a corporal of the militia joined them and touched his hat to Ellen.

"Excuse me," he said. "Though I may seem your enemy, I am not so. As a soldier I must obey orders, but I wish I had been set at other business than guarding the house of this heartless old fool. He is afraid some of you will come and murder him in his sleep to-night, and I don't believe one of you would touch him with a pair of tongs. You had best see Colonel Caswell. He is a gentleman, and if he can do anything for you he will."

They thanked him, and proceeded on their way.

"Now," said Ellen, "we must try the churches."

A sneer crossed Hugh's lip, but as she did not look at him it was unperceived, and he mastered his feelings as well as he could. During the next hour they visited three clergymen, all of whom told substantially the same story. While sympathizing with all in distress, they had no power to open their churches for such a purpose. The standing committee, or the wardens, or someone

else had the right to do that, if anybody, and a regularly called meeting would be necessary before a legal vote on the subject could be taken. How long would it take to get the wardens together? Well, a week's notice was provided for in the rules.

When they returned to the encampment in the street, Colonel Caswell was there awaiting them.

"My position here is a delicate one," said the colonel to Ellen, who was introduced to him as the chief authority on the part of the strikers. "My orders are merely to co-operate with the town officials in the preservation of the peace. This practically places me under their orders until I hear further from the Governor or adjutant-general. I understand they have refused you leave to enter the town buildings, and at their request I have placed a strong guard around each building, as well as at the residences of the principal officials. But I have pitched forty tents on the Common for the use of my men, and these are at my own disposal. After consultation with my officers I offer you five of these tents for the use of such of your people as most need them."

Tears came into Ellen's eyes as she grasped the hand of the young officer.

"You are a true man, sir," she said, feelingly. "May God bless you! But I cannot bring myself to take your tents, and thus deprive you of the rest yourselves will need."

"Do not have any fear on our account," he answered, smiling. "We shall probably get accommodated at the hotels. Being owned by the corporation I understand the landlords have refused to aid your committee, but they will not dare refuse me. I think I have the right to demand admittance, but in the absence of positive knowledge on that point, I shall certainly make a good

be so kind as to take some money to Mr. Mayfield for me, to use where he thinks it needed most? I can do that without feeling that it places me in opposition to Philip, and it may do much good."

Ralph willingly complied.

"How much shall I take?" he inquired.

"Oh, a hundred dollars to begin with, and tell him he shall have more if he wants it. Let him understand that if he needs as much again, or ten times as much, he has only to come here and ask. How long shall you be gone?"

Her cousin started at the question.

"Why, is there any hurry?"

"Yes; it may soften his feelings toward us."

"But he seemed very gentle, I thought," said Ralph.

The blind girl sighed deeply.

"Ah! You people who see! How little you understand! He is the most depressed man I ever heard speak. His words were polite enough to the ear, but I could detect the biting irony in every line. He considers us wretches who are crushing him and his fellows for our own brutal pleasure. Did what he said deceive you? It made me tremble."

An hour later Ralph found Hugh, and did his errand.

"I will take your money and message to the committee," said Mayfield, "but I cannot guarantee that they will accept it."

"Not accept it!" echoed Ralph, in the utmost astonishment.

"Possibly. We shall be in want of money, but we may not like to accept charity from those who are responsible for our present condition. If it were for me to decide alone, I am sure that would be my verdict. However, I will leave it to the others, uninfluenced by anything of my own, and abide by their judgment."

Ralph took another hundred from his own pocket-book, and placed both of them in Mayfield's hand.

"Add that to it from myself," he said, "and I most earnestly trust you will accept both."

That evening Hugh called at the Agency and asked to see Mr. Melbourg. Ralph happened to be out at the time, and the caller then requested to see Miss Edna. He was shown into the parlor, and soon she came toward him, groping her way after the manner of the blind.

"Miss Melbourg," he said, rising.

"Mr. Mayfield, I am glad to welcome you here again. Please be seated."

Her voice was unsteady, and his hardly less so as he proceeded:

"You were kind enough to send some money this morning for the use of our committee—"

"A trifle," she interrupted.

"Which they have directed me to return to you."

Edna was a woman, and the result was a great disappointment to her. She found the tears coursing down her cheeks, much to her embarassment, before this young stranger.

"Here is your gift, and also Mr. Melbourg's, which you will permit me to leave with you," he went on, as well as he could. "You will spare me, I trust, giving the reasons that have actuated us in our decision. These are times when ordinary rules cannot be considered."

She was quite crushed, but managed to stammer that she was sure he and his friends had done what they thought right · that she had meant to do them a kindness; and that they would continue to receive her deep

sympathy, which they could not reject. Then he bade her a kind good-evening.

When Ralph came home she told him, and he was not, on the whole, greatly surprised. Westland listened with wide-open eyes when he heard of it, but said nothing.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN AN ARMED CAMP.

Nathalie awoke in her little chamber in the corporation lodging-house at Riverfall, and saw the sun peeping in at the east window. Miss Flaherty, her room-mate, was still wrapped in slumber, and her honest Irish face lay, with the rosy hue of youth and health upon it, on the coarse pillow. It was the morning when this particular building must be vacated, according to a notice tacked on the door. "You will render up the said premises before twelve o'clock at noon, under the usual penalties." And after that, what? After the meagre furniture, and the girls' trunks containing their clothing, and the girls themselves, had been placed in the public street—what then?

Nathalie pondered a good deal over this conundrum, but she felt no uneasiness. Would not Ellen be there to direct everything? She had the fullest confidence in the ability of the Marchioness to bring them out all right in the end.

There was a slight tap at the entrance, a tripping of small feet in that direction, a whispered "Who is it?" and an answer that satisfied her. The French girl

opened the door, and found the object of her thoughts on the threshold. Ellen glanced in and saw that Miss Flaherty was still asleep. Then she bade Nathalie throw a shawl over her head, and accompany her across the entry to her own rooms.

Ellen was fully dressed, and bore no special mark of the great responsibility that had been thrown upon her shoulders, other than a deepening of the earnest look in her dark eyes. The French girl seated herself upon the bed, and, for greater comfort, drew the outer coverlet over her bare feet. She knew that Ellen had not called her without having a reason, and waited with becoming patience to have it made known.

"By noon more than a hundred families in Riverfall will be homeless," began Ellen. "The authorities have not yet given us permission to occupy the public buildings, but I have no doubt they will do so when the emergency is actually upon them. I want you to keep within call all day, ready to execute my orders with all possible dispatch. I have selected you out of all the girls here, because I have such perfect confidence in your judgment and integrity."

Nathalie could not have defined all of the words that Ellen used, but she knew she was receiving compliments that she was far from deserving, and the tears filled her eyes.

"I will do whatever you tell me," she said, earnestly. "I have not always been a good girl, but you may trust me to be true to you. Only, it seems as if I could do very little."

"There is a man," Ellen proceeded, quietly, "who will allow us to store things in his sheds until something better offers. His name is Donavan, and his teams will come for the goods as soon as we are ready for him. But if

tempt, he went to the rack in the front hall, donned his hat and overcoat, and sallied into the street.

It was quite chilly. The overcoat was necessary for ordinary comfort on that October night. He did not think of taking any particular direction, but he soon found himself nearing the village. The Town Hall loomed upon his vision and, as he was wondering whether any of the strikers had found a place within its walls, a sentry stopped him.

It is a peculiar sensation—that of being challenged for the first time in your life by a uniformed man who carries a musket, and places the point of a bayonet within a few inches of your breast. As the sharp word "Halt!" rang out on the air, Westland felt a shock. In his preoccupied condition of mind he had quite forgotten for the moment that Colonel Caswell's men were in Riverfall.

"Halt!" said the sentry. "You cannot pass here!"

The wanderer went away without a word. It did not occur to him to say, "I am Agent Westland, of the Great Central Corporation, which owns everything in Riverfall, and no man ever dared stop me before." He was in the presence of a new force before which stouter minds have quailed. Besides, he did not wish to excite controversy, and one direction was as agreeable to him as another.

The sentry had time to notice, by the dim light of a gas-lamp, that the man he had challenged did not seem to be a "mill hand," and he offered him this explanation:

"It was feared the strikers might attempt to enter the Town House and we have been ordered to guard it on every side."

The agent wandered on. Twice more was he stopped by sentries. One of them told him, "The orders are that no one shall pass this way, as the strikers who are trying to sleep on the sidewalks ought not to be disturbed."

Another said, sharply, though in a purposely-modulated voice, "You cannot pass here, sir; no one but the women and children can be admitted to the officers' tents." At the last statement, Westland followed with his eye the pointed finger of the sentinel, and saw for the first time the white canvas houses on the Common, looking strangely out of place amid their surroundings.

"You had best follow that street and get out of the lines," added the soldier. "You will be constantly running into trouble if you do not."

"*The women and children only.*"

Westland understood now. The militia sent to protect the mill-owners of Riverfall had sided with the employes, and taken part of them into the tents of its officers! He had heard the efficiency of citizen troops doubted in cases of civil outbreak. Fraternizing with the populace so soon! Truly a fine state of affairs! Then his heart gave a great throb at the thought that followed:

"Ellen!"

She was undoubtedly sleeping—if indeed she slept at all—in one of those white tents from which he had just been turned back. Ellen, the proud, the scornful Marchioness of Riverfall, whose hold on the two thousand employes of his corporation was so much greater than his own. She rested there at the head of her unyielding forces, while he, the general of the opposing army, could rest nowhere. The first day of the actual battle was over, and she held her ground.

"But to-morrow," said the agent to himself, "will put her to a severer test. Five hundred more of her people will be dispossessed of their tenements, and where will she shelter them? The next day another five hundred will follow, and the next another. By Saturday night

nearly half the inhabitants of Riverfall will be out of doors." Then the agent drew his overcoat closer and buttoned it.

"Heavens! How cold it is!" he muttered.

He strolled slowly back toward the Agency, not with any intention of entering it, but because he thought it wise to heed the sentry's advice, and keep away from the challenging soldiers. As he neared the house he saw two female figures, fully dressed, at an upper window; and as he reached the gate one of them raised the sash and spoke his name in a low voice:

"Mr. Westland."

"Yes, Mollie."

"Miss Edna says, if you are not too tired, she would like to walk out a little way with you."

"Certainly, Mollie. I will wait here."

It was Edna's maid who spoke, and the other was, of course, Miss Melbourg herself. It did not seem odd to Westland that these two women should be up and dressed at two o'clock in the morning, and anxious for a stroll in the streets. He had ceased to consider anything remarkable except the commonplace. In a town like that which Riverfall had become, where a sentry could dispute the agent's right to go where he pleased, nothing could surprise him very much.

Edna presently appeared, warmly dressed, and took his arm. Mollie, out of regard for Mrs. Grundy's feelings, followed at a respectful distance; not far enough to excite alarm in her maidenly bosom at her unprotected condition, and yet not so near that she could hear the conversation of the other strollers, if they chose to speak in ordinary tones.

"Where do you wish to go?" was his first question.

"Down into the village."

"But the soldiers have guarded every place, and will not let us pass. I myself have been challenged several times within the last hour."

"Let us go as near as we can."

They walked on for several minutes without further words. Then the blind girl asked:

"What are the soldiers here for?"

"To furnish lodgings for the strikers, apparently," he answered, cynically. "Half of them are sheltered in their tents at this moment, I understand."

"Half, Philip? Which half?"

"The women and children."

He realized by the closer clasp that she gave his arm that she was glad. It did not astonish him. Nothing was as it ought to be.

"Are you sorry, Philip?" she said.

"Sorry? I? Why should I be sorry? They are out of the corporation houses. What does it matter to me where they go after that?"

She waited a little.

"It is a cold night," she said, clinging closer to him.

"Yes."

"Some of the strikers are entirely out of doors?"

"All of the men, I suppose. And all of the women would have been but for the meddlesomeness of that militia colonel."

She stopped there in the street and, releasing her hand, drew away from him.

"And you would prefer that they endured this weather unprotected! You need go no further with me. I will call Mollie."

He caught her hand and replaced it in his arm roughly.

"I shall escort you home, if you desire to go there," he said, sternly "Two women cannot wander about in

Riverfall after midnight, with the streets filled with strikers and soldiers!"

She submitted passively. They started to return at a faster pace, which soon became, however, slower even than before.

"You know all about it, Edna," he said, querulously. "You know how these people have put themselves out of work and home of their own accord. And yet you talk as if it were *my* fault!"

"No, Philip," she said, gently, "I do not know whose fault it is. I will leave that to heads that are, perhaps, wiser than mine. But I do know that it is too cold for anybody to live out of doors at this season."

"Why didn't they stay in-doors, then!" he snapped. "They had but to make one sign of intention to resume work, and every notice of eviction would have been torn down! I went so far yesterday as to hint as much to the committee that waited on me. But, no! They are determined to break me, and they reckon with the wrong man! I have ordered them out, and go they shall, unless they come and ask for clemency in the proper spirit!"

She waited a little while again, wanting to say the right thing and uncertain how to shape her words.

"If," she began, "if—I was thinking; if some of them should die—from the exposure."

She could feel, though she could not see, the glare of his eyes as he turned them on her.

"Well, I wonder if you would lay that on *me!* If there are deaths, let them charge it to those who ordered them to quit the mills, who have counseled them to resist to the last extreme. They cannot give the blame to one who continued to hold out, and would even now hold out the olive-branch!"

Edna answered quietly:

"Then you think all the fault is Ellen's."

He started at the word. She felt how it thrilled him, for in her blindness his very heart-beats connected themselves with hers.

"It is the fault of anyone who has led them wrong," he said, his voice trembling.

"Ralph tells me they obey Ellen like an army," said Edna. "Then if death results from these evictions, she will be a murderess! And yet they say you love her!"

She said it deliberately, fully expecting the most unpleasant consequences. To her surprise, Westland retained the semblance of composure into which he had fallen.

"Who says that?" was his calm reply.

"The strikers."

"Who told you?"

"Ralph. He has heard much from them during the past day or two. One of the men named Converse coupled your names in the public street. He was a member of Ellen's principal committee, but that night she ordered his discharge from duty."

He was lost in thought for a moment. Then he said:

"Converse? Probably it was the same man who assaulted the constable's messenger and threw his notices into the river. I was trying to think where I had heard the name. So Ellen discharged him, did she? She is a determined woman."

Edna was surprised at the unmoved way in which he spoke.

"You will remember I told you, when you first spoke of her, that it was a case of love," said she.

They were nearing the Agency, and he slackened his already snail-like pace.

"If that were true, my dear girl,' he said, with deep

feeling, "would it make less plain my duty to protect at all hazards the property of my employers and wards? Would I have any right to give way to a sentiment that might weaken the loyalty I owe in other directions? You never saw me troubled as I have been the past month. My heart is naturally tender, but I have had to steel it. I prefer to say pleasant things, and I have been compelled to say hard ones. Do you think I find it agreeable to contemplate the spectacle of shivering, homeless men and women? You have known me too long for that. A great question is left for me to solve, and I have decided to sink all else until it is settled. The country has been distracted by periodical strikes, injurious alike to employer and employe. The suffering caused by these disturbances has been enormous. I want to make here an example that shall so encourage mill-owners that labor troubles will be at an end. Heretofore the working people have been treated like children who get anything they want if they only cry loud enough for it. Prove to them that a strike cannot be a success, and they will never strike again. On the other hand, let them but win in a struggle such as this, and all the capital in America will be at their mercy; the market will fall into a state of chaos; shutdowns will become no longer matters of choice, but necessity; and the laborer himself will find, instead of regular, fairly-paid employment, only a precarious livelihood. If there is a man in the world whom I esteem, it is Hugh Mayfield. If there is a woman who seems unselfish, noble and of superior mind, outside of my intimate acquaintances, it is she they call the Marchioness. But what are love and esteem when opposed to Duty? No, my feet cannot be seduced from their plain path, though it be planted with thorns and overhung with brambles!"

The blind girl heard him with profound surprise.

"If things are allowed to take their own course," he added, "this strike will be ended in a fortnight, and the mills be in full operation again. Mistaken sentiment at this time would injure both us and them."

"In the meantime," said Edna, "the nights will be very cold. Could not the same result be reached without this hardship? It seems dreadful to be homeless."

"It is necessary," was his reply.

They had reached the steps. As Mollie came up with them, Edna bade her enter the house, saying she would follow in a moment more.

"Is the Marchioness very beautiful?" she asked.

"Extremely so," he answered. "It is a marvel that, with her wonderful attributes, she should choose the life of the mills."

"And Mr. Mayfield," she added, hesitatingly. "What is he like?"

"Oh, Hugh?" said Westland, pausing to consider. "Well, he is of about my height, with blue eyes and rather light hair. A fine, sturdy, honest fellow."

She dropped her voice for the next question.

"Do you think they will ever marry?"

He looked at her strangely.

"Each other? Hugh and Ellen? No, it is not conceivable. Both are too deeply interested in the labor question to give much thought to such things, but under no circumstances do I think they could ever mate."

She went into the house, and left him there. He could not quite understand the meaning in all of her questions. Perhaps she was jealous of Ellen. Perhaps she did not like to share him even as a friend with any one. But he was used to the blind girl's caprices, and had been from her childhood, and he soon dismissed the matter from his mind.

Sleep being as far as ever from his eyelids, he took another walk down the street. Before he had gone a dozen rods he met Ralph Melbourg, and found that young gentleman in a state of high excitement.

"What's the matter, Ralph?" he asked, as the young man paused before him with glowering face.

"Matter? Matter enough! You are going too far, Phil! I have spent the night in the village. Do you know what is going on? Soldiers guarding the Town House, men wrapped in bed-clothes shivering on the curbstones, women and children sheltered by militia officers in their tents! By God, Phil, do you know what you have got to do! You must have the rest of those notices torn down by daylight, and issue orders to let these people back into their tenements! Damn it, we have almost had a frost!"

While Westland did not relish his friend's remarks, he could not repress a smile at his impetuosity.

"Must I, indeed!" he answered. "Well, I shall do nothing of the kind. The people can go back into the corporation houses at any time prior to November 1st, provided they sign the new schedule, and on no other terms."

Ralph's anger increased visibly at these words.

"You say you won't have the notices pulled down!" he cried. "You will persist in throwing the rest of them out!"

"Undoubtedly," was the quiet response. "But it seems to me that some one has been changing his mind rather suddenly. A few months ago, he was lamenting the reduction in his income that these same strikers made last year; now they have his sympathy in a move that is exactly similar, but more aggressive. Why this remarkable alteration in your attitude?"

The growing indignation of the young man made it almost impossible for him to answer coherently.

"Hang my income!" he cried. "I have seen too much to-night to ever want again an income from mill dividends. I have seen families separated; wives, sisters and mothers thankful to accept a canvas roof offered by charity; husbands and fathers left like dogs outside the doors your men have locked upon them! I have seen their miserable belongings, hardly fit for tramps, saved from destruction only by the kindness of a truckman who carted them off to his sheds! I have seen children crying because their customary piece of bread was denied them! One of the little ones was so ill he could not hold up his head. Ellen took him in her arms and carried him into one of the officers' tents. It is doubtful if he lives till morning, as the night air is dangerous in his weak condition! By God, Phil!—"

But Westland interrupted him.

"Where is that child—in which tent?" he asked, white as a sheet. "It shall be brought at once to the Agency, and I will have a doctor for it. Why did not some one tell me of this? Where have you been all night instead of letting me know?"

Ralph gave an impatient snarl.

"What good would it have done to let you know—you who have said within a minute that you will turn the rest of them out as fast as you can?"

"But not the babies! I didn't realize that there were any babies!" stammered the agent. "Show me which tent he is in."

"I can't. I didn't notice. The sentries are all around, too, and you can't pass."

"I can at least get a doctor and send him there. They

will not refuse him when he states his errand. Come Ralph, go with me."

But the young man was firm.

"I will not!" he cried. "I will have nothing more to do with you while you continue to represent a miserable corporation that is turning its old servants into the street. I am going into the house to pack my things, and in the morning I will have them taken away."

"Very well," said Westland. He did not care to prolong the argument. He feared that his patience might collapse under the strain. He went at once to the house of the leading physician of the place, Dr. McNally, and awoke that gentleman from a sound sleep.

Dr. McNally was surprised when he learned the nature of Mr. Westland's errand, but as his customer was undoubtedly able to settle all bills, he prepared without delay to do his bidding. Together they proceeded to the Common, where the doctor informed the sentry who accosted him of his object. This sentry called an officer of the guard who, after some parley, admitted the pair, and even condescended to show them where the sick child was.

Mrs. Mulligan, the child's mother, was wringing her hands, and mourning in a high key when the visitors were announced. The child himself was lying in Nathalie's lap, in a feverish sleep, frequently broken. Ellen sat by with some medicine in her hands which she had procured, and when Dr. McNally learned what treatment she had pursued he nodded his head with satisfaction. What was most important now, he said, was to remove the sufferer to a room where a better temperature could be maintained, and he asked the mother if she were willing to accompany him to his residence.

"An' shure, its kilt the b'y is already widout movin'

him!" cried Mrs. Mulligan. "May God forgive the man who turrend us out of doors on this cruel night! Poor little Patsy! It's an angel ye'll be befure the sun rises, an' all the docthors in Ameriky won't save ye!"

Westland winced at the allusion to himself, and was painfully aware that the other women present fully sympathized with the sentiment conveyed. Ellen came to the doctor's assistance, and finally, by promising to accompany her, and to send a messenger to her husband to tell him where she had gone, secured Mrs. Mulligan's consent to do as requested. Nathalie wrapped the baby in warm blankets, and went along also. After the party had passed the military line, Ellen and Westland fell a little behind the others.

"You were very kind to bring the doctor," she said to him.

"Not at all," he answered, quickly. "I went for him as soon as I knew of the case. I wish I had heard of it earlier. Let me say another thing while we are alone. I am inexpressibly rejoiced that, notwithstanding all that has passed, you and I can still meet on terms of personal friendship."

Ellen looked up at him brightly. Through the dim light of the early dawn he could distinguish her features, none the less lovely for the pallor of a nearly sleepless night.

"Why should we not be friends," she asked, in her most musical tone, "when each is doing what he thinks is right?"

"And yet one must be wrong," he said.

"True," she repeated; "one must be wrong. But if he believes himself right, God will surely hold him guiltless, though there may come a time when he would give much to undo the evil he has caused."

feint. If you will accompany me I will show you the quarters, which you can then occupy at your convenience."

Ellen went over to the tents and, after a little talk with Hugh, accepted them with many protestations of gratitude. The work of selecting the more helpless from among the houseless groups was at once begun. Aged women, young mothers and nursing babes were taken first. As the militiamen noticed the strange sight —their officers' quarters given up to the strikers they came to suppress—a murmur of astonishment went through the camp. Then, when the soldiers began to realize that nothing but the canvas walls would stand between these people and total exposure, the best side of them came out. Five minutes later Colonel Caswell was asked by his men to allow them to crowd themselves closer, so as to permit of surrendering yet other tents to the women. To this request he gladly gave his consent, and no less than fifteen of the tents were thus placed at Ellen's disposal.

By close packing these sufficed to shelter all of the women and children, and most of the very old men, leaving the young and middle-aged men still unprovided for.

"Don't worry about the rest of us, Ellen," said Hugh. "Go and take care of your women. Most of us have overcoats, and there are blankets for the others. We are tough and hearty, and shall not suffer. If I knew what we are to do for the other babies and women who are to be turned out to-morrow, I should feel better."

"Leave that to God!" she said, earnestly. "He who has done so much for us to-night will not desert us if we trust in Him. I am going to pray, before I sleep, for

every soul in this town, that he will have them in His keeping."

"Every soul?" repeated Hugh. "Shall you pray for Philip Westland?"

A tremor passed over her frame.

"Yes, for him also," she said, devoutly. "I do not know a man who needs God's grace more. Good-night, Hugh."

When every one around her was still, Ellen lifted to Heaven a long and earnest supplication. Then, though she did not expect to sleep, exhaustion overcame her. The last sound she heard was the sharp voice of a sentry, as he challenged some late passer through that armed camp that had been so recently the peaceful village of Riverfall.

CHAPTER XIV.

"YES, I UNDERSTAND," SHE SAID.

Mill-agent Westland paced the rooms of the Agency until past midnight. Sleep had of late become a stranger to his eyes. He had begun to look haggard. A lifelong habit of early hours and unbroken rest was completely destroyed. He found, to his surprise, that he had nerves, and ones that could be jarred painfully, too. His appetite had left him.

He walked up and down the house in the hope that drowsiness would be thus induced, but the only effect was to make him more wide awake, if possible, than ever. He knew how much he needed the rest that so persistently fled from him. At last, discouraged in his vain at-

and the corporation. But his questioners could not understand how a colonel in gorgeous uniform, with a sword hanging to his belt, could take orders from a craven civilian.

Hugh Mayfield slept but a few hours, lying on the sidewalk, with a bed-quilt over him, but at daybreak he arose, as fresh as a lark. His superb physique stood him in good stead on an occasion like the present. Summoning his most trusted assistants, he saw that sufficient provisions were distributed to the hungry crowd, and then went hither and thither, giving advice and assistance wherever his presence was required. He had a good deal to do. Everybody seemed to consult him, and none questioned his decisions. While thus engaged he saw, somewhat to his surpise, that Ralph Melbourg was waiting to speak to him.

"May I have a word with you?"

"Yes," said Hugh, "only make it as brief as possible. I am, as you see, very busy."

"You refused my money," said Ralph, speaking in a quick, nervous way. "I come to offer it again, and this time I offer myself with it. I have thrown up Westland forever. All my sympathies are now on your side. I have just had my things taken away from the Agency. I could not live longer with a man who does such cruel acts."

"Cruel!" interrupted a pleasant voice at his side. "Are you not mistaken?"

Ralph turned and saw the Marchioness, who had silently approached. The three were quite alone. No striker would have dreamed of coming near when Ellen and Hugh were in consultation, and what they might say was as secure from listeners as though bolts and bars had held back the world.

"Cruel!" said the pleasant voice again. "Philip Westland cruel! You would not say so if you had seen him at my tent this morning with Dr. McNally, whom he summoned to attend Mrs. Mulligan's sick baby."

"It was I who told him about the baby!" cried Ralph, eagerly. "I met him about three o'clock, near the Agency. I had just come from the village, and the sights there had made me very angry. We had a few hot words over the matter, and I told him I should leave his house in the morning. I have just done so, as I was telling Hugh."

Mayfield waited for Ellen to reply. When she was present he never assumed to direct a conversation, except at her expressed wish.

"There are two Westlands," said Ellen. "One of them is a noble-hearted, honorable, generous gentleman. The other is the agent of the Great Central Corporation. Which of them did you meet?"

"There is but one Westland in Riverfall whom I know," was Ralph's surprised reply.

"Oh, excuse me, but there are surely two," she answered. "One ordered the Mulligan family out of their tenement on a cold October day. The other sent a doctor and nurse to the Mulligan baby, and would have taken the entire family under his charge had they consented to go. You see they are very different men."

He began to understand.

"Now, let me hear again, if you please, what it is you wish to do?"

Then Ralph reiterated, though at greater length, what he had said to Hugh. He was thoroughly in sympathy with the strikers, and wanted to be put where his time and what means he had would serve them best. He was not rich, but he had a stated income that he desired

to use in their interest. He wanted to identify himself with them as against the greedy corporation that had turned them out of doors.

"You are acting under excitement," said Ellen, when he paused for breath. "Those in my ranks are required to behave with calmness and discretion, obeying their constituted leaders without delay or question. I fear you could not bring yourself to serve in this manner."

"I could!" was his emphatic reply. "I will take any obligation that you prescribe. Only put me into some place where I can aid you, and you will never regret the step. The first thing I want to do is to run over to New York for money, which I will place at your service. Or, if you prefer, I will expend it there for such things as you most need, and have them sent on. I am fully in earnest. Try me!"

Ellen motioned to Hugh, and together they took several steps away. When they returned, she said:

"It is our custom—and a necessary one we have found it—to admit persons to our counsels only after a careful test. Though you seem honest in your proposal, and we have no reason to doubt you, we must act according to our rules. If you go to New York you may send us anything you desire, and we will accept your gift with thanks. When you return we will talk further. The principal thing I wish to urge upon you is discretion. Our cause is more likely, at the present moment, to suffer injury from careless friends than from its natural enemies."

Ralph accepted the terms with gladness, declaring that he would so prove his fealty and his judgment that he would receive him into full fellowship after a time. Filled with his new enthusiasm, he took the earliest train for the city, where he arrived soon after noon.

His first visit was to Westland's office, where one of the clerks honored his call for money without hesitation. As he had drawn nothing for several weeks he had nearly $500 to his credit, and he took the whole amount, only regretting it was not larger. He gave brief answers to requests for information as to the way things were going on in Riverfall, and left as soon as he had transacted his business. His next move was to visit a tent-maker's, where he hired some large tents, and ordered them sent at once to Riverfall; then to a grocer's, where he purchased tea, coffee and flour in generous quantities. A hardware dealer's and a druggist's completed the list.

Considerable time was consumed in making these purchases, and in writing a long letter to Hugh. It was dark before he finished, and as the last train that would make connections for Riverfall had left the city, it occurred to him that it would not be a bad idea to make a call at his rooms, and see if everything there was in good order. When he reached the apartment hotel in which they were situated, he proceeded leisurely up the stairs. He had his keys in his pocket, and had no need to call the janitor. But when he arrived at his own door, he paused in surprise to see a light through the transom, which betokened that there was some one within.

It was the safest place in the world, apparently, for a burglar of quiet tastes to amuse himself. With the occupants of the suite out of town, and a janitor who had been given no information as to the probable length of their absence, the knight of the saw and jimmy, once inside, could take his full leisure to perform his operations. But the lessee of the premises had unexpectedly put in an appearance, and there was to be a denouement not down on the programme as originally laid out. Ralph was no coward. He never so much as thought

of summoning assistance. Drawing from his pocket a revolver which he was in the habit of carrying, he examined it carefully. Then he inserted a key in the lock, and, with a noiseless motion, stepped inside.

There was no one in the little hallway into which the door opened, and the soft rugs gave forth no sound when pressed by his feet. The young man waited a second and listened intently. Some one was moving about in an inner room. He locked the door at which he had entered, determined that the burglar should not have a chance to escape in that direction, and then stealthily crept forward, with the cocked revolver in his right hand.

When he reached the room whence the slight sounds proceeded, he saw that the door was slightly ajar. A bright light burned inside, and the movements of the depredator could now be heard with distinctness. Ralph no longer hesitated, but threw open the door with a quick motion, and covered the intruder with his weapon.

There was a scream of alarm, and the burglar fell to the floor, crying for mercy. As Ralph heard the cry, and saw the quivering heap on the floor, he thought it by all odds the queerest burglar that he had ever seen or heard of. It looked much more like a young girl, in the height of a charming dishabille, than a dangerous housebreaker. The next second he threw the revolver upon the bed, and caught the frightened figure in his arms.

"Nathalie!"

"Oh, Ralph! How you scared me!"

"How came you here?"

"And how came *you* here?"

Explanations were in order, and Nathalie gave them during the next half hour, as she nestled in her lover's

arms in one of the great arm-chairs. She had told Ellen of certain treasures that she wished to sell, in order to aid the cause of the strikers, and had obtained leave to come to the city for that purpose. She did not know that Ralph was also in town, and supposed she could pass the night quite undisturbed in the solitude of the old rooms. His unconventional advent had startled her not a little, but in the joy of seeing him again she soon forgot everything else.

"What do you think I was doing?" she asked, when he understood at last all the necessary whys and wherefores. "I came here in my mill clothes, of course, and began to unpack my best things, to see what I could sell to the best advantage. As they came out, one after the other, I had an uncontrollable desire to put them on once more, and see how I used to look as *une grande dame.* If you do not think me too silly, I would like to finish."

The idea pleased him, and he bade her proceed, by all means. But first he clasped her a little longer in his arms, in her bewitching undress, pressing kisses on her neck and arms, until she became quite flurried, and tore herself from him in a pretty burst of pretended indignation.

She took out her finest garments, and proceeded to array herself in them, donning each article with a nonchalance that nearly drove him insane. As the soft, delicate goods, edged with the finest laces, were placed about the exquisite young form, Ralph felt returning all his old love for wealth and what it will buy, and a corresponding diminution in his devotion to the cause of the poor She drew on the tinted silk hose and fastened them with silver clasps; enclosed her waist in satin corsets; hung a string of pearls about her snowy neck; put on her fingers the rings and in her ears the

jewels so long discarded; buttoned the bottines that fitted the little feet so perfectly; arranged her hair in the familiar way; and, finally, donned her most becoming dress. And Ralph, like the graceless young scamp that he was, thought how much all this was to be preferred to the calico and the pewter ornaments of a Riverfall mill-girl.

Nathalie knew nothing of what was passing in his mind. She was too busy in the operation of surveying herself before the long mirror to think of anything else. When the last hook was fastened and the toilet was complete, she turned to Ralph with the utmost honesty, and said:

"Did you ever see anything quite as pretty in all your life?"

He tried to clasp her about the waist, preparatory to crushing her in his embrace; but she managed to evade him, declaring that he would spoil it all!

"Yes, I have seen something as pretty, and even prettier," he responded, when it occurred to him to answer her question. "You looked prettier, for instance, in the costume you wore when I entered the room."

"Why," she stammered, "I wore hardly anything at all!"

"Yes," he smiled, "that is what I mean."

She blushed at that, and said he was a naughty fellow, and struck him with an ivory fan that hung at her waist. And he made his peace by declaring that she looked like a seraph, which, if seraphs ever wear pearl silk, cut décolleté, she certainly did.

"And now that you are ready," he said, "we will go to the theatre."

"Will we?" she cried, in ecstacy.

"Yes: it would be too bad to put all those things on

for nothing. I will get a carriage, and if we hasten we shall not be very late. It will not take me as long to get ready as it did you. Have your hat on, and in two minutes expect me."

He hurried off to his own room, and returned within the time specified. The first act of the play had just begun when the young couple entered their box. Ralph had never taken Nathalie to a stall, and he did not think this the night to commence that sort of thing. The girl did not pay much attention to the stage, but she looked a good deal at the house, and the house returned the compliment by looking a good deal at her. Ralph was so pleased to see her like herself again that he thought of little else. He did not look much at the stage, either. It was enough for him to watch that expressive face, that rounded form, that dainty bundle of dry goods that made up the creature called Nathalie.

She was perfectly happy. She pointed out Astorfelt and Vanderschmidt, who occupied boxes with their respective sweethearts. No one could have guessed that she had worked in a mill within two months, and slept in a tent donated by charity just one night ago. She chattered incessantly, and he—he listened ; it was all he cared to do. For that brief time he was as contented as she.

"That's not a very pretty girl of Vanderschmidt's, do you think ?" was her comment. "You know Annie May wanted me to take that place ; the ridiculous idea ! She's got on lots of diamonds, though. Doesn't he look awful sappy ! I hope you won't speak to him unless he comes over here, and then be as frigid as you can. Annie May can toss her head as much as she likes ; she's not as pretty as I, and she owned it once to me. I've heard that Astorfelt is going to ship her off for somebody

younger as soon as he finds the right one. She is really getting scrawny. Compare her neck to mine, now !"

She paused for Ralph to indicate his approval, which he did by a thoroughly appreciative smile and nod.

While strolling in the foyer between the second and third acts, Ralph met Mr. Ezra Baker, the late agent of the Riverfall mills, who expressed the greatest pleasure at seeing him. Mr. Baker had been introduced to Ralph some time previous, in Westland's city office, and knew that the Melbourgs were heirs to considerable stock in the Great Central Corporation. He therefore pressed Ralph for the latest news in relation to the strike, and, on learning that he had recently spent some time in Riverfall, insisted that he come at once into his box, and give him all the information he possessed. Almost before he was aware of it, Ralph was introduced to a young woman who sat there, and who was called, "My friend, Miss Thurston."

"So Westland is actually firing the strikers out of the corporation houses," said Mr. Baker. "I didn't think he would have the nerve to do it. A few nights out of doors in weather like this will bring them to their senses. There are a lot of militia down there, too, I hear. I hope they have loaded their guns with ball, and will give those fellows a taste of lead before they leave."

He went on in this style for several minutes, placing Ralph in a state of great perplexity. He did not like to provoke a controversy in the presence of a third party whom he had never met before. Besides, he was now in some doubt as to his own exact sentiments on the subject under discussion. The environment of the theatre, the sight of the wealthy chums of former days, and the transformed Nathalie, all combined to confuse him.

As soon as he could excuse himself he did so; but Baker followed him out for another word.

"What do you think of her?" he said, winking in the direction of Miss Thurston. "Not so bad, eh? She worked in one of the Riverfall mills till six months ago, when I brought her up here. Since then I—well, in fact. I keep her. It's a good place to get a girl—those mills. They've never had much money, and they don't expect a great deal. This is my fourth from there. You've got a pretty one there, I see. Couldn't introduce me, could you?"

Ralph wanted to knock him down, and came within an ace of doing it. But he restrained himself, and only said:

"No, I couldn't indeed!"

Then he somewhat abruptly opened the door of his own box, and walked into it.

When the play ended he waited a little while, not caring to encounter any other acquaintances. At the exit he had the satisfaction of seeing the well-known carriage of Astorfelt disappearing through the square. He took a modest coupé, and drove with Nathalie through a quiet section to a French restaurant, where he was not known to the waiter. It was but little after midnight when they were again in the familiar precincts of their dwelling

Nathalie unclasped her jewels before the long mirror and unbuttoned her dress. Then, complaining that her boots hurt her, she took them off, chattering all the time like a magpie on the events of the evening. Ralph sat there watching her, breathing in the beauty he had never so fully appreciated. He had always thought Nathalie lovely, but he had never known her full perfection till now He envied no man on earth when, a few minutes

later, he took her in her loose, clinging robes and strained her to his heart.

It was a delicious moment, but, like many another, it did not last. As she lay in his arms a thought came into the girl's mind—a thought swift and powerful. She sprang up and suddenly stood before her lover, her left hand pressed over her rosy mouth, and the right raised as a barrier between them.

"Oh, Ralph!" she cried. "I—I forgot!"

She was prettier than any picture, but he did not like the change. Something told him it boded ill for his happiness.

"Forgot what?"

"Ellen!"

"Nonsense!" he answered, though the blood fled from his cheek. "Don't be a little goose! Ellen is at Riverfall. Her authority doesn't extend as far as this."

Nathalie shook her head positively.

"But—I promised her, Ralph. You don't understand. It is a very serious thing. She forgave me all my past, and treated me as if I had always been good—and—I promised. And when I saw you here I—I forgot everything!"

Nothing could be more charming than her attitude, Ralph thought, though he did not purpose yielding to her argument.

"Now," she continued, "if you will please go—"

"Go!" he exclaimed, trying to laugh. "Go—where?"

"To some hotel—"

"Well, I guess not, my dear! These are my rooms, and you can hardly drive me out of them in the middle of the night at your fancy."

It looked like one of the old quarrels, but the girl was

so engrossed in the important question at issue to get angry.

"Please leave me, then, till I can dress, and *I* will go," she said, gently. "We cannot remain here together. No, we cannot, indeed!"

Her eyes lit on a crucifix in her drawer—a crucifix that she had owned all her life, and that money could not have bought. She took it up, pressed it to her lips, and then knelt on the carpet. Before the symbol of a faith he could not comprehend Ralph Melbourg's temper vanished.

"I will go, Nathalie," he whispered.

"May the Holy Virgin bless you!" she cried. "But, oh, Ralph! How I hate to have you leave me!"

"It is enough for me to hear you say that," he smiled. "Kiss me good-night now, before I change my mind. No?" he added, as she shrank from him. "I only want a brother's kiss. Surely you can give me that!"

"A brother would not be in my room when I was dressed in this costume," said the girl, and a blush covered her face as she spoke.

He walked slowly to the door. Then he paused and said, with vehemence:

"Why are all the nicest things in this world so wicked? To kiss the girl I love, to clasp her in my arms—why is that wrong? I would give more to hold those little feet of yours in my hands to-night than to plunge my arms elbow-deep in gold coin! Why must I seek a cheerless bed in some miserable hotel instead of staying here with the dearest thing that breathes?"

This unexpected burst was too much for the volatile French girl. She extended her arms, and moved toward him.

"Ralph, you may stay!"

He thought that over a minute and then continued, earnestly :

"There is another thing, Ellen, that I want to say to you. You must forgive me for alluding to it, and I do not ask for a reply now. These troublous times seem so likely to draw us apart, that I must avail myself of even this inauspicious moment. I do not know when we shall meet alone again, and I wish to tell you—"

She laid a hand on his arm, and turned toward him such a startled, pleading face, that he stopped short in the path.

"I beg you, do not say it!" she gasped.

"Ah!" he said. "But—you understand?"

She took several steps away before she realized that he was not following. Then she turned half toward him, but did not raise her eyes.

"Yes—I understand," she said, faintly, and went on alone into the doctor's house.

CHAPTER XV.

AN OATH ON THE CRUCIFIX.

The sun rose and tried in vain to dispel the haze that hung over Riverfall. The air still continued to be very chilly. Some hundreds of people whose bed-curtains had been the black sky of night, and whose breakfast had been more scanty than usual, were quite sure it was chillier than common at that season. Several hundreds of other people who were preparing to obey the eviction notices that were tacked on their doors looked with

doubt at the clouds, and feared rain before sunset. And some hundreds of others, whose turn was to come later, wore gloomy faces quite in keeping with the threatening aspect of the heavens.

Colonel Caswell's men still made a show of patrolling the village and "protecting the property" of the mill corporation, as well as the residences of the town officials. Those of them who had been on guard during the night slept the sleep of tired men in their tents. Others strolled about, discussing the situation in low tones. Though they were, in truth, "holiday soldiers," and not particularly in love with the task assigned them, their commander could find no fault with their obedience of orders. That extraordinary thing called discipline, which makes a thousand men execute the will of one like automatons, was well enforced in this regiment. When the colonel received the Governor's order, he took with him his best companies. And he said afterwards, in his report, "My men reflected credit on themselves, on their regiment, and on the Commonwealth."

The colonel slept at the Riverfall House, and he slept well. Most of his commissioned officers were with him. Entirely refreshed, he arose early and took a stroll through the village. His engaging manners, as well as his kindness in giving up his quarters to the women, had begun to make him popular in spite of the disagreeable quality of his business in the place. "Good-mornings" were showered upon him from the poor fellows whose bed had been the soft side of a brick, and questions were more plentiful than he could have desired. He was compelled to repeat many times that he could do nothing except act in conjunction with the town authorities, and that it was quite improper for him to express any opinion on the points at issue between the people

But now it was his turn to become obdurate.

"No, I shall go," he replied, firmly.

"But not out of the house," she said, pleadingly. "I will be very lonesome. Sleep in the next room. There will be no harm in that."

"Yes, it would be equally bad for your reputation."

Tears sprang to the girl's eyes.

"Ralph, I have none!"

He caught her in his arms, to kiss away the salt drops. She began to sob, partly at the mental strain she had undergone, and partly at the impetuosity of her lover. But he whispered something in her ear that made her raise her eyes to his. He pressed a long kiss on the trembling lips, and repeated his words.

"You do not mean it!" she said. "Why do you say such things to me?"

He put her down, and took up the crucifix.

"Shall I swear on this?"

She took it from him, saying he did not believe in it; and he took it back again.

"It is sacred to you, and that will make it so to me," he said. "Now, on this cross I swear to do what I told you."

She received his kiss again, saying, "You may stay now, for I know you will keep your word."

"No; worlds would not tempt me to remain with you after that oath!" he answered. "I will sleep in the next room, however, that you may feel protected. Only," he smiled, "there are bolts on your door, and you will withdraw them at your own risk."

She laughed, and said she was no longer afraid.

Very early the next morning Ralph awoke to find Nathalie at his bed-side, fully dressed in the plain garments she had worn at the mill.

"We have hardly more than time to get breakfast and take the early train for Riverfall," she said, stooping down to kiss him.

In a few minutes he was ready to accompany her. But before they left the house he led her into her own room, took up the crucifix, and said, devoutly:

"My little wife that is to be, the oath I took last night I now renew!"

CHAPTER XVI.

"I AM A MURDERER."

"How is our patient this morning?"

It was Philip Westland's question to Ellen, as he met her at Dr. McNally's gate, on the day after he engaged that physician to care for the youngest Mulligan. In the multiplicity of her cares she had still found time to call frequently to ascertain the condition of the sick child.

"Patsy is alive and we hope for the best, though his recovery is yet a matter of uncertainty," she replied. "There were more than a thousand persons in Riverfall exposed to the same danger last night. But that you knew already," she added, looking him full in the eyes.

"Not a soul has slept out of doors except by his deliberate choice," he answered, rather fretfully. "How can a corporation be expected to furnish houses for people who are doing their best to destroy it? Ellen, you and I should be honest enough not to evade that issue."

They had left the doctor's, and were walking very slowly toward the village.

"Is not turning them out of doors on the approach of winter rather rough usage?" she asked. "Last night the sky was the only covering for many of the corporation's former servants. A kind friend—Mr. Ralph Melbourg, with whom I believe you are acquainted—has sent us tents that will accommodate a part of us to-night; but he has done, I believe, no more than Philip Westland would do, were he not the agent of the mill corporation."

He answered quickly, lest she should suppose for a moment that he endorsed her statement.

"No, I would not. I think it would be mistaken charity. The quicker the strikers are reduced to extremity the sooner will they betake themselves to some place where they can earn an honest living. If Ralph's purpose is to benefit the people of Riverfall, he has adopted the wrong method."

At a turn in the road they encountered Hugh Mayfield, who bowed politely to Westland and raised his hat to Ellen. She saw that he brought tidings, and surmised that they were unpleasant ones.

"What is it, Hugh?" she asked. "I think we can have no secrets from our friend here."

He replied, without hesitation:

"The town officials have forbidden us to erect our tents on the Common. They say it is an unwarranted use of the public domain."

Ellen thought a moment.

"They allowed *cows* to be pastured on it all summer," she said, slowly, "but of course this is different. We can have no conflict with the law. We must try to find some other place."

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Westland was touched at the gentleness of her manner.

"I wish I could persuade you to advise the people to go to work again," he said, earnestly. "I will do any reasonable thing to bring that about except to alter the schedule. Your courage is admirable, but your case is hopeless. Do not let obstinacy carry you too far beyond the point of wisdom. How can I ask my directors to give up when your every move is an open defiance?"

Before Ellen could answer, the constable who had charge of the evictions came toward them.

"A word with you, Mr. Westland, if you please," he said.

With Ellen's example before him Westland could only repiy:

"If you come on business, you may speak where we are."

"In the list of those ordered out to-day," said the constable, "is a man named Converse, who declares that he will not move. He has fortified himself with arms and provisions, and dares us to cross his threshold."

"Did you come to make any suggestion or inquiry?" asked the agent, coldly.

"Yes sir; I want to know what we are to do."

"I am surprised," replied Westland, "that a man clothed with the authority of your office, and who can call upon all the power of the Commonwealth if he needs it, should ask such a question of me."

The constable looked nonplussed.

"Then you want him removed at any cost?" said he, interrogatively.

"I decline to give you instructions as to your duty," replied the agent

The constable reflected a moment, and then walked away in a brown study.

"The statute is as plain as the nose on that man's face," said Westland, to Ellen, when the constable was out of hearing. "In a government of laws we must take things as they are."

Ellen looked tired and careworn, but in her eyes there was no trace of the word "surrender."

"Converse is a man who means well," she answered, "but he was too uncontrollable for us. I hope no one will get injured through him. You are witness that none of *my* people (she laid great stress on the word) have offered you any resistance."

When Westland returned to the Agency he found that an unexpected guest had come to dinner. It was Mr. Ezra Baker, who had run down to take a personal observation of what was going on. In the course of the conversation that followed, the ex-agent used many expressions in regard to the strike that were very offensive to his successor, and compelled him to reply for some time in monosyllables. When the noonday meal was served they sat down to it alone, Westland having thought best to advise Edna not to be present, as he did not desire her to meet a man of whose gentlemanly qualities he had such a poor opinion. Baker gave a long story about meeting Ralph at the theatre, and managed to make the recital so disagreeable that his host could hardly endure to listen. But the culminating point came when he turned his attention to Ellen, and alluded to her in terms that no decent man could have used. What he said need not be repeated, but it was sufficient to arouse Westland to the highest pitch of indignation.

"I have listened to you, sir," he said, rising to his feet,

"as long as I possibly can. Will you do me the kindness to leave the house?"

"Leave the house!" repeated Baker, insolently, as soon as he could speak for astonishment. "I will do that at my own convenience. I think this house is owned by the corporation of which I am a director."

Westland walked to the dining-room door, and through the hall to the street entrance. Leaving each of the portals open, he returned to where he had left Baker.

"This house is at present under my control!" he said, savagely. "Now, you can either get out or be kicked out!"

Baker chose the former alternative; but as he descended the steps of the mansion his threats of vengeance could have been heard for some distance.

When Westland had time to think, he was disgusted with himself. He could not remember another time in all his life when he had so given way to anger. He had boasted of his ability to control himself under all circumstances. He trembled to think what he might have done had Baker resisted.

The voices of the men had been raised so high that Edna Melbourg, sitting in the adjacent parlor, had heard something of the disturbance. When all was quiet again she came out to meet Westland.

"What was it, Philip?" she asked, with the frankness of long acquaintance.

"A dog," he answered, sharply, "tried to bite one of my friends, and I turned him out of the house. Do not ask me any more. It is not pleasant to think of."

"I am glad I did not dine with you," she said, after a moment's pause. "What do you hear of Ralph?"

"He has joined the strikers, and is spending his money to help them to resist the corporation. Baker told me

something else of him, but he is such a liar that I place no reliance on it."

"Ralph is a boy of the best intentions," she said, extenuatingly.

"Yes," he answered, grimly, "but do not forget that hell is paved with that material."

That night over two thousand persons were roofless in Riverfall. The militia officers still gave Ellen the use of what tents they could spare, though "prominent citizens" of the State, all of whom happened, curiously enough, to own stocks in mills, wrote sharp letters to Colonel Caswell, remonstrating against his action. The colonel acknowledged no authority except that of his superior officers, and no word had come as yet from them on the subject. The tents that Ralph sent were pitched in a private lot in the low district, a very unfit place on various accounts, but better than none. But when night fell there were still more than two thousand persons entirely out of doors, and these included many women and children. And to add to the discomfort, a drizzling rain set in.

Ellen made one more attempt to soften the hearts of the town officials, and secure the opening of the public buildings for at least a portion of the more helpless of the outcasts. Her only answer was a reiteration of the old refusals. The authorities were, as afterwards transpired, under the pay of several of the mill stockholders, and they had gone too far to recede. After that Ellen tried some of the churches again, but without avail. The rain began to increase in volume, and when she returned to headquarters she was seriously alarmed at the prospect. She found Nathalie awaiting her, and knew by the bright smile on the girl's face that she had something pleasant to communicate.

"I have just left Père Laroche," she said. "We have had a long talk. His heart was with us, but he feared the bishop. The tendency of the church is to discourage strikes, he said, and he did not dare show too much sympathy, but when he saw the rain he was much distressed. 'I'll tell you what you can do, Father,' said I. 'You can announce an extra vesper service, and they can attend. Then, if the rain continues, no priest would turn the people out into it.' 'I'll do it!' cried the good Father, delighted. 'Tell all to come that can get inside the doors.' 'They will have to bring their bedding,' I said, 'to keep it from getting spoiled.' He hesitated at that, but finally said they could put it in the vestry. So all we have to do now is to bid every one to prayers!"

Ellen kissed the girl on the forehead, which amply repaid her for her successful move; and, after a moment's consultation with Hugh, she issued the necessary proclamation.

Then followed a scene perhaps unprecedented in American history. The people, by hundreds, laden with their goods, betook themselves to the sacred edifice so unexpectedly opened to admit them. Soon every seat in the grand auditorium was filled, while many crowded the aisles, and not a few of the weaker ones stayed below with the mattresses, blankets and comforters that were there. When Père Laroche ascended the altar he saw a sight that gratified his pious soul, while at the same time it filled him with a profound pity. The service was given with all possible impressiveness. The pastor's remarks contained allusions to the peculiarities of the occasion, which, if circumspect and guarded, were yet full of undisguised feeling. A large part of the audience were unable to understand the language in which he

spoke, and some were Protestants who had questioned whether they ought to enter a "Popish" church, even to secure shelter from a storm. But the benignant countenance of the good père and the comfortable atmosphere of the edifice soon drove away all doubts, and they gazed with the interest of novices at the (to them) strange proceedings.

Philip Westland, uneasy in his mind, watched the slow shower for some time from his window at the Agency. Then he donned his hat and a rubber overcoat, and walked down into the village. He had in his pocket a pass that Colonel Caswell had thoughtfully sent, entitling him to penetrate the military lines at his pleasure, and he presented it whenever he happened to meet a sentinel. His walk was aimless, and taken merely to ward off his nervousness. He soon noticed that the streets wore a deserted appearance. His first thought was that the town buildings had been opened to them, but a stroll in that direction showed the sentries still on guard, and no lights at the windows. He had a curiosity to learn what had become of his evicted tenants, but he was too proud to ask, and he might have gone without the information had not one of the soldiers, seeing his inquiring gaze in all directions, come to tell him.

The mill-agent had no particular care for the French church—nor for any other church—but ten minutes later he softly ascended the steps of l'Eglise de Sainte Marie. With noiseless tread he reached the interior, and looked upon the remarkable spectacle. He understood French well enough to comprehend the words of the priest, who had taken for his text the paragraph relating to the difficulty of the rich entering heaven As Westland's eyes rested on the throng he felt a new pity surging through his brain for these unfortunate people

Could they have read all that was passing in his mind, they might have felt a pity for him, too. He was becoming sore distressed, and was as nearly ill as it is possible for a man to be and still keep his feet. Night after night of insomnia was doing its work. At the end of a few minutes he left the church, and, for want of anything else to do, went home.

A servant handed him an envelope, with the remark that a messenger had brought it during his absence. He looked at it a long time before he broke the seal, for he knew the superscription to be Ezra Baker's, and he did not like to read anything of his. When at last he opened it he found these lines:

"To Philip Westland, agent of the Great Central Corporation at Riverfall:

The undersigned intends, at the regular meeting of the directors which occurs to-morrow, to make the following charges against you:

1. That you have wantonly insulted a director of the corporation at the Agency.

2. That you have acted contrary to the interests of the corporation in these respects, namely: By being unduly intimate with several of the leading strikers; assisting strikers by sending them a physician and supplying medicines; refusing aid to a constable when a striker declined to vacate his tenement after being warned to do so; telling the commander of the militia sent to guard the corporation property that you knew of no reason why he was sent here, thus encouraging the lawbreakers.

3. That at least one person, if not more, whose income you control, has been using his property for the aid of the strikers.

4. That you have in general shown a signal inability to cope with the strike, and ought to be removed."

The mill-agent read this document through twice. His only thought was that Mr. Baker had been rather busy since he came to town, to acquire so much information in so short a time. Then he donned his hat and rubber overcoat again, and sauntered forth once more.

Why had he ever undertaken the thankless task of settling these labor troubles? He had esteemed it a duty he owed to his clients and wards, but was it really so? There were other large owners and trustees of Riverfall property as well as he. Why must his shoulders bear all of this terrible burden?

He strolled over toward Dr. McNally's, thinking he would inquire about the baby, but on the way there he met Ellen. As he paused to greet her, he saw that her face was wet with tears, and the eyes she raised to his were so blinded that she could hardly see him.

A chill passed over his frame; a chill like that which comes to one who stands at the newly-opened entrance to a tomb!

"Do not speak!" he said, hoarsely. "I know it all. The child is dead!"

She put one hand against his breast, bearing a little of her weight upon him.

"Don't mind it too much," she said, speaking with difficulty. "Perhaps—I am not sure—it may be—he would have died any way. He has never been very well."

"No," he responded, like one who talks in his sleep "You cannot lessen my guilt. I am a murderer!"

She cried out at that, and tried to detain him. But he went home in a daze. In his bedroom he found in the long mirror the same figure that had confronted him before, only it had grown more fierce and haggard.

"I know," he said, humbly. "I make no defence."

But he would not remain there. He sought a sofa in the room below, where the accusing spirit could not glare at him. And there he staid, with the lamps all lighted, till another dark morning came.

CHAPTER XVII.

A LITTLE FIRE IN THE GRATE.

No resident of Riverfall will ever be likely to forget the day following the events narrated in the preceding chapter. To Philip Westland especially it seems to stand alone among the days of that remarkable week.

It was cloudy, but the rain had ceased falling. The lodgers in the French church were rather sorry to see that the weather was clearing. There would soon be no longer an excuse for good Father Laroche to turn the sacred edifice into an inn.

Colonel Caswell and his commissioned officers had slept well at the Riverfall House. Their men, who were patrolling in the rain, were not so lucky, however, as their superiors. They were getting tired of playing soldier, where there did not seem likely to be anything to do in the way of quelling disturbances. Still the State authorities gave no order to evacuate, and the apparently useless garrison was kept up.

Ralph Melbourg had slept with the "other strikers" in the church, lying on one of the mattresses in the broad aisle, within reach of Nathalie's hand, which he clasped furtively under a coverlet. It seemed very odd to be there, after the services were ended, among these tired

work-people, with that dear little hand clasped in his own. The gas-lamps were partially lowered, and a "dim, religious light" enveloped the auditorium. The face of the Saviour, depicted in many scenes of his unselfish life, looked down on the concourse with a divine compassion. Amid these surroundings Ralph felt the most serene contentment. When all about him were asleep except the girl whose hand he held, he leaned over and pressed a kiss upon her lips. No purer act was ever witnessed by the eyes of angels. When he had done this he fell into a quiet slumber, still holding the tiny hand as if it were an anchor that would keep him from drifting out into the Unknown.

Edna, in her rooms at the Agency, was much troubled in her mind. She knew that Westland was undergoing a strain so great that serious consequences might be feared. The blind girl knew also that her heart had gone over to the opposition, as Ralph's had done, but her infirmity kept her within certain limitations, and besides she felt that Philip needed her at present more than any one else. She had never till recently supposed there were two sides to a labor agitation. Her education had always taught her that mill people were of a restless, aggressive mind, and were periodically stirred up to make unreasonable demands, by a set of rascally fellows who had personal ends to serve. But, in place of sight, Edna had an increased acuteness of hearing. When she heard Ellen and Hugh, honesty sounded in every syllable, and the words sunk deep into her plastic mind. She saw that there was a mistake somewhere. If they were right, then Philip was woefully wrong. She had thought of these matters very late on the previous night, and on the morning of which we write she rose with a feeling of unusual apprehension.

Badly as Westland himself slept, he left the sofa at daylight and went out for a walk. Although it was so early, others were stirring also, among them Mr. Ezra Baker, whom he met sauntering along the sidewalk, wearing a complacent smile. It was not in Westland's nature to be uncivil, except under great provocation, and he returned a forced answer to Mr. Baker's ironical "Good-morning."

An inclination he could not resist led him among the tents. First he visited those that Ralph had furnished. They looked damp and cheerless. The location of these tents was most unsuitable for purposes of residence, being on low land, toward which surface water naturally flowed. As he came along, he saw that the women were astir and that the children were being washed and dressed. Some strange-looking edibles were simmering in kettles hung out of doors, over improvised fires.

The faces that the agent encountered did not greet him with especial signs of pleasure, and he wandered over to the Common. He went toward the officers' tents, still given up to the more helpless of the strikers. As he drew near he heard one saying to another, "The funeral will be to-morrow." And, shaking with a chill wholly out of proportion to the coldness of the atmosphere, he turned his steps toward the Agency.

"Perhaps he would have died any way."

Ellen had told him that, in hesitating accents, striving between her tendency toward absolute truth and her disinclination to give him pain. He went in to breakfast and ate something, despite the heavy burden he was carrying. Criminals who are doomed to die at ten o'clock are often said by the enterprising newspaper men who observe their last moments to "eat heartily" at nine. Westland's strength had failed rapidly during

the past fortnight, but he did his best to keep it up, and he and Edna took their meal together that morning as usual. When it was finished he complied with her request to spend a few minutes with her in the parlor.

She held open the door, and, when he passed in, closed it behind him. Then she came to where he was, [illegible] accuracy that perfect vision could not have surpassed, and he took her hands to guide her to a seat before him on a sofa.

"No, not there," she whispered. "Get me a low stool or hassock that I may sit at your feet. I feel very humble this morning."

He found her a hassock, and she assumed the position she had indicated, laying her head upon his knees. Time passed on and she said nothing. At last he broke the stillness.

"What is it, Edna?"

"I only wanted to feel some one near me again," she said. "Some one I cared for before I came into this sorrowful place. It is not *love* that I feel for you—oh, no! I am sure now that it is not *love*—but I want very much to receive sympathy—and—and to give it. We need it, as we never did before—both of us!"

He stroked her hair gently, after the old fashion.

"I realize all at once how I have neglected you in the crush of my duties here," said he. "That you need sympathy in this out-of-the-way town, with these gloomy surroundings, I can well believe. But I—for what could I need it?"

"You do need it, Philip, for you are in the most trying of situations. You are striving to do right, and are not certain that after all your endeavors you are succeeding. And there is another reason why you need it, and for that I wish to give it to you most. You have at last

found a woman you love, and see between you a great gulf fixed."

Nothing could surprise him. At another time he might have wondered who told the inmost secret of his heart to this girl, but he never thought of that. Everything had become a matter of course.

"Great gulfs have been bridged before now," he said, thoughtfully. "As to the other matter, there is liable to be a change very soon. The directors meet this morning at eleven o'clock."

"For what purpose?"

"It is their regular monthly meeting, but a special matter will come up. Baker is to submit charges against me."

"Against *you*!"

Absolute incredulity was in the expression.

"Yes. He accuses me of mismanagement and of too great leniency to the strikers."

"What shall you do?"

"That will depend on circumstances. I am a little out of patience, but I shall try to meet it with calmness."

She took one of his hands and pressed it to her lips.

"I could advise you, Philip, but I will not. Let your heart lead you. It will be your best guide."

The directors met at the time appointed, and so great was the interest in the situation that every member of the board was present. When the routine business had been transacted, the agent made a report of what he had done and was doing to carry out the policy of the corporation. Although the directors had explicitly instructed him to pursue the precise course he had followed, they were in a dissatisfied frame of mind. They had vindicated their power, to be sure, but the longing for dividends, which is so large a part of the make-up of a mill-

director, led them to place their main thoughts upon the slight prospects of success in that direction. In all cases of the kind the actuary bears the blame for adverse results, no matter how fully his superiors have endorsed his course in advance. When Mr. Baker's "charges" were produced and read to the meeting, they fell on attentive ears.

"Does Agent Westland wish to reply to these charges at the present time," asked the president, Mr. Erastus Stebbins, who occupied the chair, "or shall they be referred to a special committee under the rules?"

Westland rose with the utmost coolness. He took the paper that Baker had submitted, and glanced over its contents.

"I have never," he said, "wantonly insulted any person in my life. I did order from this house the person who makes these charges, because he, while sitting as a guest at my table, used expressions unfit for any decent presence. I have been intimate with the two leading strikers, and have used my best endeavors to convince them of the hopelessness of the fight they were waging against the corporation I represent. I sent a doctor to attend an infant belonging to one of the strikers, which" —here his voice choked—"has since died. I told a constable who applied to know whether he should use force on a tenant who refused to obey his notice, that he ought to know his duty without applying to me. I said to the commander of the militia which is quartered here that I knew of no troubles that the local police could not manage, and the quietness of the town has borne out my statement. It is a fact that a young man whose property I hold in trust, but over whose actions I have no control, has, against my protest, assisted the strikers. So much for these allegations. As to the last

one, that I ought to be removed, it is enough for me to know that a single director holds that opinion. I shall take pleasure in resigning a position I never sought, and have reluctantly consented until now to retain."

A dead silence fell on the assembly. Then the president asked:

"Do I understand that Agent Westland offers his resignation?"

"I shall offer it within a few days," was his reply.

Ezra Baker arose.

"I trust the clerk will take notice in his record," he said, "that the agent withdraws under charges."

"That is as you please," said Westland, in response to the interrogative look of the clerk. "It is a matter of complete indifference to me."

Then he left the room.

An hour later, when he returned, the clerk handed him a copy of a vote which had been passed. The president was empowered to accept the agent's resignation whenever it should be offered, and thereupon to place the corporation's property in the hands of Mr. Baker, who had consented to take charge until a regular election could occur. All of the directors except Baker had left town on the early train, and the clerk soon followed them.

At lunch Westland seemed imbued with new spirits. Edna thought she had never known such a sudden change in any one. He told her of the action of the directors, saying it would now be but a few days before she would have to change her quarters. He suggested that Riverfall must be getting dull for her, and that she had best go back to the city, but she would not consent to think of that. She wanted to stay and see it out, she said. So

it was arranged that he should secure apartments for her, as well as for himself, at the Riverfall House.

The first thing he did after lunch was to send for the constable who had attended to the ejectment of the tenants from the corporation houses. As he had not spoken to that functionary since the day he declined to give instructions in the Converse matter, it was something of a surprise to him to be summoned. Another thing it may be worth while to state. Not a word of the directors' action had transpired in the village up to that hour.

"How many unserved writs of ejectment have you remaining?" asked the agent.

"About three hundred."

"Where are they?"

"Here, in this package."

"I will take them."

The constable, in some surprise, handed them over, inquiring when he should call for them.

"Never," answered Westland. "They are not to be served."

"Not — to — be — served!" echoed the astonished official.

"Precisely. That is all I have to say to you at present."

When the constable had left the house, Westland placed the package in an open fireplace, and applied a match to it. After he had watched it slowly consuming, he strolled down town and sought out Hugh. The first lieutenant of the striking forces, when he was found, came up and shook hands in his usual courteous manner.

"I want to meet all of the corporation's dispossessed tenants where I can speak to them in a body," said Westland. "I have a message for them."

Hugh bowed silently, and went off to find Ellen, with whom he soon returned. This was not what the agent wanted. He had hoped to accomplish his intention without a preliminary conference with her.

"I learn," she said, pleasantly, "that you have a communication to make to your ex-employes. As I possess the delegated power to represent them in all things, would you be so kind as to deliver your message to me."

As he looked into her clear eyes, he felt a great choking in his throat. How strong his love had grown for this superb creature, who seemed as far from him as one of those stars that gaze on us at night from out the inaccessible empyrean.

"If I give the message to you, it must be when we are alone."

"I am content. Name the time and place."

"The Agency," he said, "at three o'clock."

"I will be there."

The temporary relief that resigning the position of agent of the corporation had given him seemed to have vanished. If he had doubted that he was far from well, the faintness that came over him before he reached the Agency would have given him a warning. He went into the parlor and waited with some misgivings. As the clock was striking the hour agreed upon, a servant ushered Ellen into his presence. He motioned her to a chair.

"Let us proceed at once to business," he said, and she saw that he was looking unusually pale. "Would it be any object to you—and to the others—if I were to open the houses and permit all to occupy their old premises for the present? I can give no warrant that they can remain very long—perhaps not more than two or three

weeks. But—if it would be pleasant to you to have me do so—I would like to admit them on those terms."

She saw that he grew still whiter as he proceeded.

"Can you explain this any more fully?" she asked.

"No, I cannot. I have already taken the balance of the writs from the constable, which will leave those not yet dispossessed in their houses. The ashes that you see on the hearth are all that is left of those documents. If the others would like to go back—if you would like to have them—I will give them instant possession. It is a matter of my own—it is nothing to do with the directors—but I have the power and will exercise it, if you desire. When they are dispossessed again—as they doubtless will be—a week's notice will be necessary as before. I know the nights are growing colder—and—I thought—

His words came slower and slower, until at last his power of utterance ceased. It was not a swoon, but merely the result of overtaxed energies acting upon the vocal organs. Ellen felt that there was more cause for his emotion than appeared on the surface, but she thoughtfully avoided saying anything that might add to his discomfort.

"I will tell the people of your generous offer, and I think they will decide to accept it," she said. "As you truly say, it is growing very cold at night. Is there anything more?"

He roused himself like one who has inhaled pure air after partial asphyxiation.

"Yes, Ellen, there is another thing. I shall resign my position with the corporation very soon. When I do so I wish to join your ranks, with what property and influence I possess."

Her dazed look showed that she could not comprehend this all at once.

"As Ralph did," he explained, huskily. "You accepted him; you can accept me. I have some money—a little over $100,000. I will place it at your disposal, for the benefit of these people—whom I have helped—to wrong."

His voice had sunk very low again, but in the silence of the room she caught every syllable. What he told her made her nearly as distressed as himself and, womanlike, the tears rushed to her eyes.

"I cannot affect blindness to the reasons that actuate you, Mr. Westland," she said, with deep feeling. "You make this offer from personal regard and, that being the case, I cannot accept it."

"I told you," he made haste to reply, "that I asked for nothing. I expect nothing. I know—better than any words of yours can tell me—how hopeless it would be to think again of that great reward of which in an insane hour I once found myself dreaming. But I have fully determined to give up the position I hold at the Agency. I wish to take the side you have taken. Your people are very poor. Their chance for work here is rapidly passing away. The aid I offer you may prevent much suffering. You should think well before you refuse it."

Ellen hesitated. She, who was used to quick decisions, found herself face to face with the greatest quandary of her career.

"As I have already said, I will advise my people to return to their houses, but the rest I must ask leave to consider until to-morrow. Let me say, however, that I thank you from my heart for what you are doing. I never doubted that Philip Westland, dissociated from

the Agency of the Great Central Corporation, would prove his noble nature. You and I have been friends through it all, and never more, I believe, than at this moment. God bless you!"

She withdrew, her face radiant with new hope for the cause in which her life was bound up, and Westland wrote a notice, which he caused to be posted conspicuously, permitting all evicted corporation tenants to take possession of their former tenements immediately.

Late in the afternoon, as Mr. Ezra Baker was walking through the village, he was surprised to see that loads of goods were being carried into the deserted houses. He had been on a ride into the country, and had heard nothing of the new order. Going into the first house he came to, he demanded of the tenant in what manner he had again obtained possession. On being informed of the condition of affairs he became much enraged. Learning that Westland was in one of the tenements—the one occupied by Ellen—he ascended the stairs, and stepped without ceremony into the room.

He stalked up to the occupants in a threatening manner.

"I was right, it seems," he said, between his teeth. "You have come out openly on the side of the strikers. I shall telegraph to every director to-night, and you will be removed as soon as they can be got together."

Westland was weakened by the sleepless nights and exhausting days of the past week. But he forgot everything before the indignity of that man's unrequested presence in Ellen's room, and sprang up to confront him.

"Do not forget," he thundered, "that I am still agent of the corporation, clothed with full powers. You can neither insult me nor my friends on these premises. If you do not leave at once, I will throw you down the stairs!"

Baker took the advice given, but continued to use his tongue as long as he was within hearing.

"You have but two days more to betray us!" he shouted. "We will have you out by that time. As for this woman—"

Westland was about to throw himself upon the retreating form when he felt a touch of magic power and paused.

"Those who would be my followers must learn to bear and forbear," said Ellen, cheerfully. "Let him go. It is beneath you to lay a finger on him."

He accepted the hand she held out to him, and pressed it reverently to his lips. As they stood there he suddenly took her by the shoulders and drew her toward him. He could not have anticipated the entire absence of resistance that brought her lips close to his. Frightened at his own temerity, he released her and hastily left the house.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A STRONG LIGHT GOES OUT.

When Westland reached the Agency that evening, he found awaiting him a telegram summoning him to New York with all possible haste. He had just time to catch the late train, and it was nearly midnight when he reached the city. At that unusual hour he proceeded directly to his office, where he found his head clerk, with whom he had a hasty conference. When he came out, the hackman heard the clerk say, "He may live till morning, but the doctors say that will be the longest possible limit."

Westland stood on the steps of the building for several minutes after that, talking in a low tone with his assistant. Then he returned to the carriage, said "Fifth Avenue Hotel" to the driver, and was driven off.

At the Fifth Avenue he dismissed the carriage, and going directly to the elevator asked to be taken to a certain room, which he designated by its number. A moment later he knocked at the door and was admitted.

Dr. Odlin, perhaps the most famous surgeon in the metropolis at that time, came forward to greet his visitor, speaking in that hushed voice that denotes severe illness in the immediate vicinity.

"Colonel Eastman is anxiously awaiting you, but before you go into the room where he lies let me fully explain the situation. This morning, while hunting on Long Island, he received an accidental gunshot wound from the weapon that he carried. Though the greater part of his left arm was torn away, the injury might not have been fatal had surgical assistance been near at hand; but before aid could be obtained, except such as his unprofessional companions could render, he had lost so much blood that recovery was hopeless. When the first physician who arrived told him his condition—in answer to his direct question—he insisted on being brought without delay to this hotel. I reached here but a few minutes after his arrival, and upon making an examination was forced to agree with my professional brother. 'How long can you keep life in me?' he asked, with the utmost coolness. 'Possibly twenty hours; probably not over fifteen,' I answered. Then he asked to have a messenger dispatched to your office. When the answer came that you were at Riverfall, he sent for your chief assistant and after consultation with him the telegram was sent to you. I tell you candidly that he cannot survive

till daylight. His mind is clear, however, and he is at present perfectly competent to transact any business that he desires."

In the room to which Westland was conducted, a strikingly handsome man of about forty-five years lay in a bed propped up by pillows. The extraordinary paleness caused by excessive loss of the vital fluid only made more striking a face that would have attracted attention anywhere. The eyes were very dark and fiery. The hair and long moustache were streaked with premature gray, which carried no impression of age. The wounded man grasped Westland's hand in a manner which seemed quite at variance with the physician's prediction. It was incredible that within five hours this soul would be asleep.

"Colonel Eastman, I am truly grieved to see you thus."

It was the ordinary form of expression, but it brought a smile into the face of the dying man.

"I have a little business which I wish you would help me transact," he said, "and with your permission we will attend to that first. Then if there be time left—which the surgeon thinks is doubtful—I will cheerfully listen to your commiserations. Warden (to an attendant), I think we can spare you for a few minutes."

When the man had left the room, Colonel Eastman continued:

"I rely implicitly, my dear Westland, on the judgment of Dr. Odlin, who guarantees me at least three hours of consciousness, and I may be a trifle tiresome. But if you have ever died, or come as near to it as I am, you may agree that allowances can well be made in such cases, as nature will certainly put a limit on volubility. I regard it as settled that I cannot see another sunrise. Now, I have considerable property, and, as the laws stand,

I have a right to dispose of it as long as there is breath in me. Like many another man I have heretofore given that subject little thought. I felt myself in perfect health, and presumed that I should see my three-score and ten, as my father and grandfather did before me. The little accident of this morning—or, perhaps, it would be, by this time, more correct to say of yesterday—has upset my plans, and if I am to make a will you will readily see that I must attend to it without much more delay.

"I suppose the value, as such things are reckoned, of what is credited here and there in my name, is about three million dollars. I inherited the basis of it, and the natural increment has increased the pile considerably. I married fifteen or sixteen years ago, and there was a child —a boy—but his mother and he died together. I have no near relations. But there is a case where my conscience gives me a twinge (you'll understand such things better, my dear fellow, if you ever get where I am, with your time limited by the edict of a rascally surgeon), and I want to do what I can to set it right.

"Twenty-two years ago or thereabouts (don't interrupt me, now; you can talk, perhaps, for the next forty years, and I must do all mine to-night,) I was a young, thoughtless scamp. No worse than plenty of other young men, very likely, but bad enough. I had been elected to a seat in the Legislature of my State, and my good old father's heart was set on seeing me make a figure in politics. In an evil hour he sent me down to a manufacturing village, to vote at a meeting of stockholders, where he had large interests, which, as you know, I now possess. I did the business all right—we carried our point, I remember, but it was a hard fight—and it was so late when we got through that I had to stay in River-

fall all night. As I walked to my hotel, I encountered in the street a young girl, with whose beauty I was at once enraptured. She was the most innocent child I ever saw—she had been here but a few weeks from England. What the deuce is the matter with you?"

The last remark was evoked by an exclamation that had been suddenly forced from the mill-agent. He was laboring under an excitement that it was impossible to control; for he knew, as well as he could know anything, that it was Ellen's father who was speaking to him.

"Go on, sir," he said, in a husky voice. "When you have finished, I will explain, if you desire."

"Perhaps you knew the girl," said Colonel Eastman. "Her name was Margaret Perry."

"No, I never saw her," said Westland, regaining his composure. "Proceed, I beg of you."

"Well, it was the old story. I did not leave Riverfall that day nor the next. The pretty English weaver had possession of what I then imagined was my heart. She loved me from the first, and I found her too enticing to desert until the mischief was done. One day I received a letter from my father, saying that an important measure in the House needed my vote, and I tore myself away. I fully intended to go back, but one thing after another kept me from doing so. Finally Margaret wrote, telling me of her condition, and begging me to keep my promise to marry her. I could not do that. It would have ruined me in politics, and, beside, I really believe my father would have cut me off without a shilling. I did what cowards always do—sent her some money and tried to forget her. I feared if I went to see her, her pleadings would shake my resolutions. Don't look at me like that, Westland. When a man is dying he needs a little leniency."

Thus reminded of the harshness of his gaze, which the colonel's latest statements had impelled, Westland relaxed his features and tried to listen with outward calmness.

"It was a contemptible thing to do," pursued the colonel. "Damn it, I hope you don't think we differ on that point! I am only giving you the facts, as a preliminary to the business that made me call you here. I have had my lawyer—Mr. Wetmore—draw up a will leaving all my property to this Margaret Perry and her child, if either or both are living. If they are not, then the estate is to go to certain specified charities. Of that will I have made you sole executor and trustee. If you will touch the bell, I will send for the document, that you may say whether you are willing to accept the trust."

Westland touched the bell mechanically. When Mr. Wetmore entered, Dr. Odlin accompanied him and made a slight examination of his patient.

"How long now, doctor!" asked Colonel Eastman.

"Not very," responded the surgeon. "You are liable to a sudden lapse at any time."

"Thank you," he replied. "Now, Mr. Wetmore."

The lawyer read aloud the will, which was a short one. It bequeathed all the earthly goods, chattels and estates of Edwin Eastman to Philip Westland, Esq., as trustee, for the joint benefit of Margaret Perry, of Riverfall, and her eldest child, if living, the management of the property and its disposition under the trust to be at the discretion of the trustee in all respects. Then followed a list of alternate legatees. The document was complete except the signatures.

"You will accept it?" said the colonel, interrogatively "The fees will be handsome," he added, as Westland hesi-

tated. Or, if you have anything to say to me in private on the subject, they will leave us again."

Westfield bowed assent to the last proposition, and the door closed behind the legal and surgical lights.

"If I am agitated," said the mill-agent, when he and the colonel were alone, "I can soon explain to you my reason. This will has a remarkable significance to me. Margaret Perry has been dead these eight years. Yes, I have seen her grave in the Riverfall cemetery. But she left a daughter, whose father the people have always said was a gentleman of wealth, high in the political world. This daughter, whose name is Ellen, has been, like her mother, a weaver in one of the Great Central mills. She is a girl of the rarest natural endowments, and I can easily trace a family resemblance in your own face, now that the relationship is brought to my attention. Yet colonel, the greatest loss you will sustain in leaving life in this untimely manner is in being deprived of the sight of the pure and noble countenance of a daughter of whom a king might feel proud. Though prevented by her poverty from receiving the higher forms of education, the beauty and sweetness of her spirit make her worthy of any society. She is a leader among the strikers, who have rebelled against our recent attempted cut-down of wages. Living in the plainest manner, with no aids but her innate charm, she is the most loved and respected of their number. The tidings you have confided to me carry with them great cause for sadness on my part for, despite the difference in our social rank, I have loved Ellen almost ever since I have known her. As a poor orphan girl I might in time have won her, though thus far she has given me little encouragement. As the heiress of millions she will be lost to me forever!"

Colonel Eastman was visibly affected.

"You love my daughter? You? And you wish to marry her?"

"Yes, Colonel Eastman. After living more than thirty years, during which I never met a woman who could excite in me warmer feelings than those of friendship Ellen won my heart at the first glance."

"Tell me what she is like," said the colonel, musingly "Lovers are not impartial judges of beauty."

Westfield tried to describe his idol, but found the task a difficult one. His own enchantment was, however, made more evident than ever, and this was what his questioner was most anxious to prove.

"Say you will accept the trusteeship," he said, after a pause. "Time is pressing. There is no other man to whom I could leave it with such complete confidence."

"I will do it," replied Westland.

Lawyer Wetmore was then sent for, and the will entirely rewritten. The estate was left to Philip Westland, Esq., in trust for Ellen, daughter of Margaret Perry and Edwin Eastman, the trustee to have absolute power to control the principal as he saw fit. This will was signed in the presence of the necessary number of witnesses, who were called in for the purpose. Then Colonel Eastman asked all to leave the room except the lawyer, whom he requested to write as follows, from his dictation:

FIFTH AVENUE HOTEL, NEW YORK, *Oct.* 29, 18—

My Dear Daughter Ellen:

With but a few hours to live, the cause for which others will explain to you, I ask your forgiveness, and leave you my blessing. As a late reparation for my long neglect—a neglect that gives me the only pang at leaving earth—I have left you all my property, in trust with Mr. Westland. His father was for years my intimate friend. I also esteem and honor the son, who tells me, as things are told to dying men, that he loves you. Dear Ellen, if the

time comes when you can confide your life to him, I am sure he will never abuse the great blessing. My strength is failing and I can say no more. Your Father,

EDWIN EASTMAN.

The weak fingers could only scrawl the name, and, perceiving how rapidly the colonel was sinking, Mr. Wetmore made haste to summon Dr. Odlin. The change was indeed coming fast. The strength had departed from the maimed form, but intelligence lingered some moments longer. His speech failed, but they saw that he wanted Westland to come to the bedside, and the wish was at once complied with. As their hands were clasped together a pleased smile irradiated the transparent whiteness of the colonel's face. Then the eyes closed, and they thought consciousness had fled, but they were mistaken. A minute later he roused himself, looked about the room, as if to call on all present to bear him witness, and said, slowly and distinctly:

"I have asked my daughter to marry Mr. Westland."

It was the last flicker of a strong light. Colonel Eastman was dead.

CHAPTER XIX.

"AND SHE DID NOT REFUSE."

Back to Riverfall on the next afternoon train came Philip Westland. He had arranged for a quiet funeral, according to the expressed wish of the dead man, at the rooms in the Fifth Avenue, where he had breathed his last. The undertaker who was called in was to see to all the arrangements. It is almost as easy to bury a millionaire as a pauper, if one sets about it right.

Westland went at once to the Agency, where he found Edna in a state of some nervousness. The president of the Great Central Corporation, Mr. Erastus Stebbins, had been there, and waited for him several hours. From what the blind girl overheard, and what the servants whispered to her, the president had given everybody to understand that the agent was under his severe displeasure. As they were talking, the bell rang, and word was brought that the individual of whom they were speaking waited in the parlor.

Erastus Stebbins was a large man of important mien and heavy voice. He had come to Riverfall in response to a telegram from Mr. Baker, and had worked himself into considerable excitement when he learned all that that worthy had to communicate. It was his intention to say a number of very cutting and disagreeable things as soon as he should see the agent; but when Westland walked into the parlor and extended his hand as if nothing was the matter, Mr. Stebbins took it, and tried to assume an expression of welcome.

"I will be perfectly candid with you, President Stebbins," said Westland, "and not pretend to any surprise at this visit. You are in Riverfall on account of information sent to you by someone, that I have allowed the evicted families to re-enter the corporation houses."

President Stebbins looked relieved, and intimated that the conjecture was a correct one.

"To be brief, then," continued the agent, "I could no longer endure the sight of these people—most of them ignorant, and all of them poor—exposed to the rigors of a late New England autumn. I had tested pretty severely their determination to hold out against our reduced scale. To have gone further than I did, with the frosty nights that are upon us, would have been villain-

ous. My resignation is at your disposal. If such measures as those which we have begun are to be continued at such a season, they must be carried out by someone beside me."

Mr. Stebbins said he would be glad if the resignation of the agent could be put at once into his hands, so that he could call a meeting of the directors at the earliest possible date. It seemed to him that the situation was becoming very grave. He (Mr. Stebbins) believed himself an honest man and (he hoped) a Christian. But he did not think it his duty to sacrifice a property like that of the Great Central mills on merely sentimental grounds. This and much more said President Stebbins. And when he left the Agency he was promised the agent's resignation at the earliest meeting of the directors he could secure.

Twenty minutes after the president left the house, and as Westland was telling Edna what particulars he thought it wise to impart of the death of Colonel Eastman, two other visitors were announced—no less personages than Colonel Caswell and the State's adjutant-general. Their object was to ascertain whether the mill corporation had any opinion regarding the necessity or lack of necessity of a longer stay in Riverfall of the militia.

"I cannot in fairness speak for the corporation," replied Westland, "as I am about to resign my position within a few days. When Colonel Caswell first reached here with his men I told him I did not know of any reason why they were sent here. That statement—as a private resident, and not as a mill-agent—I now repeat. I think there has been no severe outbreak for you to quell," he said, speaking to the colonel.

"None," was the reply. "The conduct of the people

has been admirable. I doubt if so many unemployed persons were ever so orderly, under such circumstances. They are under a restraint far more powerful than my bayonets—the magic influence of a woman whom they adore."

"A wonderful woman, if all they say of her is true," put in the adjutant-general. "Well, if you see no reason for needing our troops, I think we will send them home to-night. The town officials ask that a small guard be left for their own residences, but it seems to me they are unduly alarmed. Colonel, you may order your tents struck at once.'

Westland reminded him again that he had not pretended to express the opinion of the mill-directors, but the adjutant-general said he would take the responsibility for that. The directors as such had never asked for protection, and it would be time enough to consider that matter when they did so. "There is absolutely no farther use for our men here," he said.

"The principal thing they have done," said Westland, smiling, "has been to afford shelter in their tents to some of the women and children. Now that the people are again in their houses they, at least, can spare you better than they could a week ago."

Colonel Caswell looked disturbed.

"I am sorry my act did not please you, sir," said he, "but I believed it my duty as a man and a soldier. If you could have seen Ellen's face when she thanked me—"

But Westland interposed.

"It does not displease me, Colonel. On the contrary, I honor you for it. While I was trying to do my duty to a corporation, you made the force less severe to the innocent. It was a noble action, and I shall remember it as long as I live."

It must have been a mistake; but Colonel Caswell thought there was a glistening drop in the eye of the mill-agent. And who ever heard such a thing as a mill-agent, even after his resignation was determined upon?

Westland had many things to do that day. He engaged rooms at the Riverfall House, and set the Agency servants to packing his things for removal. He sent many messages, and received the callers who responded thereto. At dusk he went down into the village where, at sight of him, a group of the strikers set up a cheer. He bowed politely to them, but it did not please him, and he hurried on. As he crossed the Common, where the last of the camp equipage was being packed preparatory to depart, he saw Mr. Baker in an angry dispute with one of the militia captains. He did not hear what the ex-agent said, but the reply of the officer came to him very clear and distinct.

"If you do not leave here immediately, I will put you under arrest. I have warned you twice, and this is positively the last time."

Baker turned away and came toward Westland. As he saw him, his hands were clenched, and he lashed himself into a sort of fury.

"Three days more!" he hissed, as he passed him. "Then I will have you turned out like a dog!"

If he had looked at the face of the man he insulted he would have seen that it was perfectly unmoved. There were deeper questions in Westland's mind at that moment than how to resent the spleen of a disappointed stockholder. He was on his way to Ellen's, and the ordeal before him seemed greater than any other of his life.

She opened the door to receive him, with the old smile of welcome. The experiences of the past week—the rev-

elations of his love and her own—had left their traces on the beautiful face, but the smile was still there. Her expression was indeed more saintly; her eyes were filled with a diviner longing: but the smile, unchanged from the old days, brought her back to earth.

She offered him a chair in her usual manner, which was as far from being prudish as it was from forwardness. He took it, and for a minute he sat there regarding her with strange emotions.

"Ellen," he said, at last, "I have a very sorrowful story to tell you."

The smile faded away before the apprehension created by these words. She knew not what to dread, but she trembled visibly. Many wild suggestions surged across her brain, but nothing like the truth. She swayed a little in her chair, and he bade her compose herself.

"Ellen," he went on—it seemed so sweet to him, that name that everybody else used so freely!—"there is great need that one whom you love should take you in his arms to-night, and tell you that a great loss has befallen you. You are strong to bear ill tidings, but there is a limit to what any of us can endure. Is there not someone I can call whose touch would enable you the better to bear great pain?"

She shook her head. She was becoming frightened. She could not take her eyes from him.

"There is one already here who loves you beyond all power to express—do not speak, it is needless; but he cannot shield you from the blow that is about to fall—that, in fact, has fallen. Instead of aiding him to acquire that right, it surrounds you with circumstances which make his case, if possible, more hopeless than ever. Are you strong enough to listen?"

She tried to speak, but the words would not come

She felt a nameless dread at the mystery into which he was about to conduct her, and yet she could not resist the desire to know all. She bowed a sufficient affirmative to his question, and he proceeded:

"There was once a young and lovely English girl, who came to America and found work in a mill-town called Riverfall. Her name was Margaret Perry."

He paused, for Ellen's eyes had overflowed, and from between the fingers on which her face rested the drops fell fast.

'Young, beautiful and innocent," he continued, as soon as he was able, "she was without relation or near friend in a strange land. One day the handsome son of a rich family—"

She put out a hand to stop him, for the ground on which he was trenching was sacred to her. The subject had never been broached, in her hearing, by man or woman, since her mother died. She knew the history of her birth, but she could not bear that another should repeat it. He took the hand that she had held out in protest, and he did not let it go. Then he moved closer to her, and spoke in a very low voice:

"This morning I closed his eyes."

She started up, with an air that was almost wild, and bestowed upon him a look of the utmost astonishment.

"You—"

"Yes. That is what I came to tell you. Your father died at the Fifth Avenue Hotel at five o'clock."

He waited for the shock that he expected, but it did not come. The girl slowly took a handkerchief from her pocket, carefully wiped away every tear from her face, and leaned toward him with an expression that clearly indicated relief.

"Is that the worst news you have brought?" she asked, with a voice that surprised him by its firmness.

He felt a dizziness at the awful intimation.

"A father's death! Could anything be worse than that?"

She took a long breath, sat upright in her chair, and nonchalantly arranged her dress. A coil of hair had fallen, and she put it back in its place with deliberation. Then she said, quietly:

"You did wrong to give me such a fright for nothing."

He could not conceal the shock that this gave him. He had not thought such words could come from those lips.

"Explain yourself," he said, coldly, "or I shall think the commissioners ought to put your sanity to a test."

"I will!" she answered, leaning toward him again, and looking squarely into his eyes. "You tell me that a man is dead—a man who perpetrated the greatest villainy conceivable upon my darling mother; who, though possessed of ample wealth, left his daughter to bear the burdens of the life he had thrust upon her; who married one woman to please his parents and keep his place in society, when another claimed him by all the holy vows that he could utter! This man you call my father, but you mistake. I had none! He is dead, you say. Well, *let him die!* I can conceive of no better thing for him to do. I trust you did not think one of these tears of mine was shed for him! They were for the mother whose young life he cut short, and whose last days he rendered more bitter than thought can imagine. Dead, is he? How much better it were for others had he died twenty-five years sooner!"

And this was the girl he had loved—whom he had worshipped so blindly that he was willing to sacrifice

fortune, duty, honor, all for the sake of her hand! He experienced a revulsion of feeling that nearly overpowered him. He had loved his own father with an intense devotion, made deeper by the early loss of the mother whom he did not remember. Lack of filial respect was to him almost unpardonable. He sat straighter in his chair, and for the first time with her his voice took on an aspect of sternness.

"The funeral of Colonel Eastman will take place day after to-morrow, in his late rooms at the Fifth Avenue Hotel. The hour has been set at two o'clock. Only three or four business associates have been invited. It will be your last opportunity to look upon the features of the man to whom you owe your being. May I hope to accompany you there?"

She realized the great change in his manner, and it gave her bitter pain, but she held out still.

"To see the face of that man, whose very name I have no right to bear, could be of no advantage. I never knew how he looked, and I have no wish to know."

"He made a will last night, after I reached his bedside," said Westland, his voice growing harder. "That will leaves you all of his property, valued at three million dollars."

Ellen looked surprised, but not gratified.

"To me?" she repeated. "Nothing to the woman who took my mother's place? Did he desert her, too?"

"She died many years ago. Every dollar is given to you. His last thoughts were of you; with his last breath he dictated a letter to you, and with his last intelligent moment he signed it with his name."

He drew the missive from his pocket and laid it on the table. She made no move to touch it.

"I am constituted executor and trustee of the estate,"

he continued, as she did not speak. "As soon as I can file my papers in court and get the necessary permission, I shall be glad to turn the property over to you."

It was difficult for her to ask the question, but she did it.

"By what name did Colonel Eastman designate his illegitimate child?"

"I will read you the entire document," he said, drawing it from his pocket. When he reached the words, "Ellen, daughter of Margaret Perry and Edwin Eastman," she clutched both arms of the chair she was occupying, in a vain endeavor to subdue her emotion.

"Do you think for one instant," she asked, "that I will take this money—coupled as it is with an insult to my dead mother's name? Daughter of a woman who never was wedded, by a libertine who deceived her and ruined her! I am, and I am proud to be, a daughter of Margaret Perry, the poor, unfortunate mill-girl; but the name of Edwin Eastman not even his millions could induce me to accept!"

He continued with the same cold, hard inflexion.

"When the time comes, then, I shall ask you to sign a release of your claims, that I may divide the estate among the distant relatives of your father who are its heirs-at-law. His will originally designated certain charities as residuary legatees, but when he made certain that you were living he did not deem it necessary to add that clause. I do not think of any other business that I have with you at this time."

As he rose to go, the awfulness of his icy demeanor came with crushing force across the girl's mind. For months he had met her as an attached friend, and until now he had seemed to grow nearer at each meeting. Yesternight, at about this hour, his lips had almost

touched hers, and had met with no resistance. A tide of love nearly uncontrollable swept over her as she saw him about to take his leave in this formal manner.

"Business being ended—and such unpleasant business—let us talk of other things," she said. He had never seen any one quite so pale. "As you have so often remarked, our friendship may be strained, but we must not let it break."

He resumed the chair he had left, but his demeanor did not alter.

"You are not pleased with me," she said, gently.

"No,' he replied, briefly. "A girl who will let the coffin-lid hide her father's face without taking one look could please no one."

"The face of a man," she answered, "whose neglect put my *mother's* face under a coffin-lid is not for her daughter to see!"

"I cannot understand a hate that will follow one to the grave! You have not even read his last words to you."

She took up the letter on the table, held it in her hand for nearly a minute, and then said, "I will read it if you wish me to." He watched her as she scanned the lines, and was surprised to see the whiteness of her cheek give place to a wave of color.

"Have you read this?" she asked, turning her crimson face upon him.

"I have not. I supposed it was for your private perusal."

"Read it."

He did so, and a flush as bright as her own came into his countenance.

"You will believe me, Miss—Miss Ellen—when I assure you that I was utterly unaware of the contents of

his note," he stammered. "You could not for a moment think—"

She interrupted him

"I am sure you did not know what was in it," she said; 'but I thought you ought to know. And did you tell him what he says, in relation to me?"

From another woman's lips that question would have sounded immodest. From Ellen's it seemed as natural as breathing.

"Let me set myself right," said Westland. "Colonel Eastman sent for me in haste yesterday afternoon. He had received a mortal gunshot wound, and knew that his hours were numbered. He had confidence in me as a business man, and wished me to administer upon his property. His first thought was of your mother. He supposed her still living, and had made a will before my arrival, leaving his property to her and to her child, should there be one. Learning of her death through me, and also of your existence, he had the will drawn which I have read to you. In speaking of you to your father I did tell him of my love, and that I feared the vast amount of money he was to leave you would destroy my last hope that you would return my affection. When he dictated this letter I was absent from the room. A few moments after he signed it he became unconscious, and never rallied. Now, Ellen, I must be candid with you. Last night I would have given worlds to call you mine. But that was twenty hours ago!"

She shrank under the blow, which was harder than he could have imagined. At that moment, to the relief of both, there was a knock at the door. It was Hugh Mayfield.

"Mr. Westland has brought strange news, Hugh,"

said Ellen, when the ordinary greetings were exchanged.

Then, with the confidence of long use, she told him all about it.

"And you seriously propose to refuse this legacy?" asked Hugh, as she finished.

"Assuredly."

"But you must not."

"Must not! Why?"

"I am surprised that you can ask," he said. "You are offered the privilege of becoming the trustee of great wealth for the benefit of the poor. With it you can relieve every destitute family in this village. You can build or buy mills in some place where they can be given regular employment at fair wages. You can provide them with homes instead of barracks. You can furnish the sick with nurses and medicines, keep the children at school, become, in short, a Princess Bountiful! Would you refuse three millions when people are almost starving about you! You would deserve the obloquy of every one of the hundreds who now look up to you as to an oracle! Refuse it! If you stood by a river filled with drowning men would you refuse a boat in which to save them?"

Then he turned to Westland with a positive air and said:

"She will accept the legacy."

It was the first time the mill-agent had ever seen the mind of the man dominate that of the woman. Clearly it did so in this case, for she made no protest.

"She will also attend the funeral," added Hugh, after a pause. And, before she could utter the reply that rose to her tongue, "Ellen has sacrificed too much to her associates not to make one more effort at an important

time like this She will go to New York with you on the morning train, and do whatever is proper and necessary Believe me, Mr. Westland, she will not fail to be ready."

Mayfield's predictions were fulfilled in all respects. The New York train on the following morning carried Westland and Ellen to the city. Upon arriving at the Fifth Avenue he procured apartments for her, and sent for a modiste, who took his orders and proceeded to array the girl in mourning habiliments according to the prevailing fashion. Hugh had exacted a positive promise that she would submit to every reasonable proposal, and she stifled the rebellious feelings that constantly rose to the surface.

In the early evening Westland called to ask that she look upon the dead. He escorted her to the door of the room wherein the body lay, and thoughtfully waited for her at the entrance. She had nerved herself for the ordeal; but when she saw the handsome face in the casket, and realized all at once whose it was, her self-possession gave way. With a loud cry she threw herself upon the bier and kissed the cold features.

"Father, dear father!" she cried. "I do, oh! I do love you! Dear, dear father, forgive me!"

She sobbed so wildly that Westland's fears were aroused, and he entered the room. The sight that met his eyes nearly unmanned him. He was greatly moved, and going to her side he put his arm around her.

"Did I say I did not love my father?" she cried, vehemently, raising her face to look at him. "I could not have said it! My dear, darling father! Why was I not permitted to tell him of my love before he could no longer hear my voice? Don't you think he can still comprehend—a little? May it not be he can hear what I say and forgive me?"

Westland told her he did not doubt it. It was a pious falsehood, but who can talk philosophy in the presence of the dead? Faith, blind unreasoning faith, is the only medicine then! It is an opiate that may at least mitigate the pain it cannot cure!

After a time he persuaded her with difficulty to leave the apartment.

She turned faintly from the casket, and accepted the support of his arm.

"I am so lonesome!" she said. "I did not know how weak I could become. I wonder if there is anyone else in the world without a single soul to love them!"

He paused and poured into her swimming eyes the full lustre of his own.

"Ellen, remember your father's dying wish!"

And she did not refuse the kiss he offered.

CHAPTER XX.

AN AWFUL SHOCK AND JAR.

Westland returned to Riverfall with Ellen, but they parted at the station. Mayfield met them there and walked with her to her rooms, like the brother he had always been. He waited for her to speak, as was his custom, but she delayed so long that he was compelled to break the silence.

"Ellen, tell me everything."

As the gentle tones broke upon her ear she looked up. Yes, it was Hugh; steadfast, self-denying Hugh, who had proved himself worthy of every trust, over and over again.

"Two terrible things have happened," she replied. "I have consented to take my father's fortune—the thought of which bears me down like a burden—and—I have promised to marry."

A shadow, brief as the passing of a bullet, crossed his features.

"I expected it; when is it to occur?"

"There has been nothing said about that. It was my father's last request, and I could not refuse. Oh, Hugh, you cannot imagine how dear that man became to me when I saw him lying in his casket! All my hard thoughts vanished, and the filial tie asserted itself with most wonderful power."

He was a man of direct speech, who knew not how to equivocate in question or answer.

"Are you to marry merely to please your father?"

"No, I do not mean that," she replied, with deepening color. "I have esteemed Mr. Westland ever since I first saw him. You know that, Hugh. You have known it all the time."

"Yes," he said, laconically. "I have known it. But why do you call your engagement a 'terrible' thing?"

She looked at him and through him.

"What could be more so? What in all the relations of life is so awful, so sacred, so pregnant with possibilities for happiness or misery? I had thought to pass my life alone, as a humble weaver in the mills, content to help where I could, and cheer the sad lot of those about me. Now all is changed. I shall have new hopes, new fears, new duties never contemplated. I shall be a wife—perhaps a mother! Oh, Hugh! I tremble before the future that has never till now given me the least apprehension!"

She waited for him to say something, but he remained silent.

"He will help me very much," she continued. "He is a man of business, and understands what to do with money. I want to get all the good possible out of my inheritance for the poor people. He is very wise and I am very ignorant. He was a hard man when he came here, because his education had made him so, but all that is changed. His heart was always right. Why do you not speak? Of what are you thinking?"

"I was thinking," he said, quietly, "how easily a woman makes excuses for the man she loves!"

What did Hugh mean? Honest, straightforward, unselfish Hugh. But he did not seem inclined to say more on the subject, and she did not like to press him.

She took a roll of bank bills from her pocket in proud satisfaction.

"Our funds must be getting low. Here is a thousand dollars. When it is gone there is plenty where it came from. Philip tells me I have three thousand times as much as that. What a marvelous thing that one person can control such a sum! That one can decree food and clothing to hundreds! It is a power like to that of Deity!"

He took up the money and looked at it.

"Whose is this?" he asked.

"Mine!" she said, triumphantly. "My own!"

"And how did you get it!"

"It was my father's."

"How inconsistent we are!" he exclaimed, with something very like a smile. "We have argued against this kind of thing—you and I—ever since we have known each other. We have been so sure that men who pile up big fortunes have no moral right to dispose of them at

death according to their fancy! We have preached the doctrine that such property should not belong to children —that it should be taken by the State for the general advantage! And at the first opportunity to test our candor we accept our millions as others do!"

But Ellen had an answer ready for him:

"When the State reaches a plane that makes it the best custodian of wealth, we will place our possessions in its hands. Heaven knows I would a thousand times rather it had the distribution of mine than that the task lay upon myself. If I did not feel sure that Philip would lift much of the burden, I should hesitate even to make the attempt."

Then they discussed the meeting of the directors that was about to take place, at which Westland's resignation would be given. Hugh remarked that it was almost certain Ezra Baker would be the new agent.

"How providential it seems," said Ellen, brightening, "that at our darkest hour I should be able to do so much! We could hope for literally nothing from Mr. Baker. But money—that factor that is all-powerful under our present system—what can it not accomplish? Is there anything that the possessor of three millions could want and fail to obtain?"

"Yes," said Hugh; "married happiness."

Her face clouded again.

"You mistrust Philip! How can you? When he was our most determined opponent you believed in him; now, when he is about to become one of us, you doubt. Do you think it is my fortune that attracts him? He told his love long ago, when I had not even a name to offer him. Don't insinuate such things. They hurt me!"

He waited a little before he answered. But he was not

one of those who shrink from giving needed medicine merely because it is not agreeable to the palate.

"Philip Westland," he said, at last, "is a capitalist, born and bred. All of his business ideas run in that channel. If he wanders for the moment from his former course it is not because his convictions have changed. I have known him long enough to read him through and through. I understand him now better than I ever did before. He is under the control of a master passion, and is exhibiting its effect on a mind unused to such influences. He is lulled to sleep. Ellen, beware of him when he awakes!"

His words distressed her, but through all she wore the look of a woman who loves and cannot be convinced.

"You care so much for conscientiousness," pursued Hugh, "and that man is not following the dictates of his conscience. He has abandoned his standard of Duty to pursue that of Inclination. He sacrifices his sense of right to his Love, as in the old German myths men sacrificed their souls for gold to the Spirit of Evil. I will do him no injustice; I do not think he cares anything for your fortune. But for *you* he is crushing out every honest prompting of his heart, and no one can do that with impunity, mistaken though those promptings be."

A glorified expression came into the countenance of the Marchioness of Riverfall—a look like that which the old masters caught out of heaven to illuminate the faces of their Madonnas.

"Happy am I to have lived, if I have indeed excited such love in the breast of such a man!" she cried, rapturously. "If Philip cares for me with that devotion which you describe, he will be only too glad to carry out my wishes, and in time the effect of his pernicious education will surely disappear. Trust me, the husband's at-

t chment will not become less than the lover's. Banish your uncanny fears. The clouds are leaving our skies, and we must see that they desert our faces also!"

Hugh's argument was continued for an hour longer, but with no effect upon Ellen. He would not say that he advised her to break her engagement, but he wished her to realize the full effect of the step she was about to take. In the optimistic light of a new-born love the girl could see nothing that militated against her desires. All that he succeeded in doing was to clear up the darkness that had fallen upon her in New York, and give her the brightest hopes she had had for months.

Westland came in while they were talking. When his eye lit on Ellen's face and he saw how happy it was, his heart gave a great bound. He took her hand with the reverence of a devotee, and together they faced Hugh.

"Have you told him?"

She assented, blushingly.

"Congratulate me, Hugh."

The "mill-hand" took them both in with his frank blue eyes.

"I can easily do that, Mr. Westland," he said. "You have won a great prize. But—can I say as much to Ellen?"

Westland started, and his face grew dark.

"What do you mean, sir?"

The Marchioness stole a soft arm about his neck, and he recovered instantly. He felt how foolish it was to mind one little spot in such an effulgent sun as shone on him that day.

"I am sorry it displeases you, Hugh," he said. "I know how ill I deserve so wonderful a gift as Ellen's love To become more worthy of it will be the aim of every hour of my life. The directors have just accepted my

resignation, and elected Mr. Baker in my place. For the first time in months I feel like a free man. I only wait now to be assigned to the new and more agreeable duty of assisting to provide homes and occupation for our friends here. I have without doubt a great deal to learn, but you will find me an apt scholar. I need all your good will, all your forbearance, all the aid you can give me. May I not have it?"

He extended his hand, and Mayfield took it in his own.

"It was I who first brought you into this room," he said, looking fixedly at Westland. "I shall never cease to regret that act if it brings one pang to the heart of this girl, or one tear to her eyes. We are friends—very good. If we ever cease to be so, woe to the one of us on whom the blame shall rest!"

Hugh left them and, much as they both liked the young "mill-hand," they were not sorry to find themselves alone.

"What came over him?" he asked. "I always supposed he liked me."

She devoured him with her eyes, in all the pride of ownership.

"What should we care, so long as we have each other?"

He endorsed that sentiment in its general effect, but still persisted in his question. He had known Hugh so long, and had been on such friendly terms with him, that the recent coolness seemed to need an explanation.

"He is often unaccountable," said Ellen, "but he is one of the best fellows that ever lived. However, you have no longer any cause to trouble yourself about the matter. He has made an alliance with you, and you have only to observe the conditions."

He laughed at that, but he grew serious a minute

after; and, taking both of her hands in his, asked if she were sorry yet that she had promised to wed him. She did not give him a verbal answer, declaring that it was absurd to treat such a question seriously, but her lips touched his for the first time, and he was satisfied.

"When shall it be?" he whispered, bending close to her.

"Oh, not for a long time," she answered, her voice shaking. "There are so many things to be done first. We must not seek too much happiness for ourselves until others are removed from the danger of actual suffering. Have you thought of any place yet where our money can be invested so as to provide the people with work? That must be done as soon as possible. Love should not make us selfish, Philip."

He drew a long breath.

"If I am to wait until I can provide work for two thousand people, I must be active indeed," he smiled. "And yet I fancy my task is not quite as herculean as it might appear. I have a scheme in mind that may accomplish the result much sooner than you would suppose. Possibly a few weeks will suffice. If it does, I will consent to the delay you ask, but otherwise I would advise you not to be too cruel; for I warn you that, as a minor heir to a large estate, I can have you put under guardianship, and get myself appointed to take charge of you."

Ellen laughed merrily at the fancy, and pressed yet closer the hand she held. How pleasant it was to have him there on such intimate terms!

"What is your great scheme?" she asked. "I told Hugh that you had a head for business which would be invaluable to our cause."

"Listen," he said. "I want you to do a little figuring with me. The Great Central Corporation is capitalized

at $5,000,000, divided into ten thousand shares of the par value of $500 each. By your father's will, you have come into possession of three thousand of those shares."

She opened her eyes wide.

"Three thousand! Have I so many?"

"Yes, Ellen. Your father was much the largest owner in these mills, and yet he had never seen Riverfall since his youth. He used to send me his stock to vote on at the annual meetings. Now, the Melbourg estate, most of the income of which belongs to Ralph and Edna, owns eight hundred shares, and I have one hundred shares. To control the stock, five thousand and one shares are necessary. With that number in our hands we could elect a new board of directors and start the mills, leaving the people in their houses exactly as they are. If you will allow me to buy enough to make up what is needed, out of your other funds—"

The girl sprang up, threw both arms around his neck, and kissed him madly.

"*If!*" she cried, ecstatically. "*If!*—"

"But there is another thing to consider," he continued. "Though the par value of the stock is $500, the troubles here have greatly reduced its selling price. I saw it quoted at $307 yesterday. At that rate we can buy all we need for $325,000, if nobody suspects what we are trying to do. Shall I attempt it?"

Her answer was to kiss him again, in the most unrestrained manner. The Marchioness was becoming very undignified.

"I will leave it all to your judgment. If it is possible to start up the Riverfall mills it will be much preferable to a wholesale deportation. Oh! how much I shall hope for your success!"

He put his arm about her waist.

"How can I help succeeding, with such an incentive!" he said. "For you are to wed me, remember, as soon as I start the mill-wheels."

"I promise," answered Ellen. "And—if you are too long about it—I may reduce the time of my own accord. Go now," she added, blushing violently. "You make me say things I am ashamed of."

But it is not so easy for engaged lovers to tear themselves apart. Another hour passed, and then, instead of departing alone, he persuaded Ellen to walk out a little distance with him. Though the evening was young, the street lamps were lighted, and they found themselves avoiding the more crowded thoroughfares.

Suddenly a terrific noise burst upon their ears, and they felt a shock that nearly threw them to the earth.

As soon as they recovered, they saw an immense crowd, that poured out of the houses and took a single direction. They followed the crowd and soon knew what had made the awful noise and jar.

Mill No. 1, the largest of the seven owned by the Great Central Corporation, lay in a heap of ruins.

It had been blown to pieces with dynamite!

CHAPTER XXI.

"WHATEVER THE WORLD MAY SAY."

When the directors of the Great Central Corporation chose Ezra Baker to fill Agent Westland's place, he told them plainly what he intended to do. He said he should carry out to the letter the policy begun and discontinued

by his predecessor, and should even improve upon it. His intention was not only to go through the evicting process again, but to fill the corporation tenements with new workmen, with whom he would at once start up the mills. If any trouble arose, he proposed to call upon the military, and next time there would be no half measures. His expectation was that the Riverfall mills would be running with imported laborers in about a fortnight. He would hire such of the old hands as he might need, but not one of their leaders should ever find employment with him. As to "that woman who called herself Ellen," there was little more to fear from her, as she had, he understood, inherited money, and would probably take herself away. The town officials, he announced, were entirely in his hands, and a case would be made out promptly against anyone who interfered in the least with the future running of the mills.

Agent Baker's remarks were greeted with applause. The directors were endowed with new courage. Under such a manager it seemed to them that a dividend might once more be earned, after all.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon when the director's meeting adjourned. It was four o'clock in the afternoon when a constable began tacking new eviction notices upon the doors of one of the corporation houses. It was half-past six o'clock in the afternoon when Mill No. 1 became a mass of ruins, with a noise that shook every building in Riverfall.

Mr. Baker himself was one of the first of those who hurried to the scene of the disaster. Though recognized by all of the mill people whom he met, not one of them had a smile or a greeting for him. As he looked upon the wreck, his lips grew white with rage. A quarter of an hour previously one of the best-appointed mills in the

State had stood on that spot. It was equipped with power, machinery and all accessories for the manufacture of cloth. In its place he saw nothing but a confused heap of brick, bent iron and broken roofing. Two hundred thousand dollars would not more than repair the loss.

And this was the net result of his first day as re-elected agent!

While he stood there one of the Agency servants came and thrust a letter into his hand. A man had just left it, he said, with the statement that it contained a message of importance. Mr. Baker tore open the envelope and read:

"One of your mills has fallen. If the eviction notices are not removed before to-morrow evening, another will go down. A guard will be useless. You cannot save them. Take your choice. JUSTICE."

The agent lost no time in seeking out the chief of police, and showing him the note.

"That is a nice kind of letter for a man to receive," he snapped. "What are you going to do? Must I stand by and see my property destroyed under such threats as this, before the eyes of your force?"

The chief hemmed gently. He did not wish to offend so important a gentleman, and yet he felt that he must say something in his own behalf.

"My entire force," he said, "numbers but thirty men. How could that number make a successful guard for seven mills? Probably the explosive used in this instance was dynamite. Undoubtedly every one of your mills has had a quantity of this material placed surreptitiously beneath it. The person who explodes it need not necessarily go inside the gates The same

result can easily be obtained, at a distance, by means of electric or other contrivances. You must temporize until another body of soldiers can be brought here. My little force was not meant for such an emergency, Mr. Baker."

The agent sniffed the air indignantly. Nothing is more provoking than to have a police force—no matter of what size—show its inadequacy to deal with any question whatever. If you lose your purse—or your child—or your wife—your first inquiry is, "Where are the police?" Should they fail, within ten minutes, to restore the missing article their complete uselessness is amply demonstrated. Mill No. 1 had been blown to atoms half an hour before, and the Riverfall police had not caught the perpetrator! The chief had even the temerity to intimate that all the other mills might meet the same fate unless terms were made with the scoundrels! Who could blame Mr. Baker for growing more excited than ever, and mentally vowing that he would have the chief and the police force and everybody else investigated before he was a week older?

The agent's next move was to seek Chairman Hunt, of the town board. That official had been so badly frightened by the explosion that his teeth were still chattering. He told Mr. Baker how earnestly he had plead with the militia to remain and guard at least his own residence, which he had now no doubt was situated on a dynamite mine. The agent was disgusted with the man's pusillanimity, but he concealed his feelings as well as he could. From his official position, Mr. Hunt's word might be of value at this time. Mr. Baker told him to go to the capital on the next train, seek an audience with the Governor, and ask that a regiment, or two, if possible, be sent to Riverfall early the following morning. A dozen Pinker-

ton detectives should also be engaged to come quietly into the town from different points, in citizens' dress.

Chairman Hunt was only too glad to leave the place, where he confidently expected to be murdered before daylight; and, with his teeth still chattering, he slipped through back streets to the railroad station, and departed on his journey.

Ralph Melbourg was paying a visit to his cousin Edna at the Riverfall House when the explosion occurred. Ralph had heard the story of Ellen's attendance at her father's funeral, and of her reputed inheritance, and these subjects formed the basis of their conversation. The terrific noise that broke upon their ears startled both, but especially Edna, whose first thought was of an earthquake. Ralph, though quite unable to assign a cause for the disturbance, quieted her as well as he could, and bidding her rest tranquil till his return, went out to learn what he could of the matter.

He had been gone but a few minutes when Nathalie came in. The little French girl and the daughter of Laban Melbourg had become attached friends during the past few weeks. Edna had learned from Ralph his intention to make Nathalie his wife as soon as circumstances would permit, and warmly endorsed his proposal. Though Mollie was close at hand, Edna felt a deeper confidence in her cousin's affianced, and welcomed her joyfully. When Ralph returned and told them of the disaster to the mill, both of the girls begged to be taken to the place. Notwithstanding her blindness, Edna had a way of her own of comprehending events, and she was as anxious to join the crowd at the ruin as any of the others who were rushing to the spot. So Ralph took one of them on each arm and sallied forth.

When they reached the site of the mill, Edna plied her

escort with a hundred questions. She wanted to know exactly how everything looked before the explosion and to have a carefully detailed statement of its present appearance. When he said that the material probably used in its demolition was dynamite, she wanted more particulars regarding that destructible agent than he could give her. A mill, in which hundreds of people had found employment, had gone down in a second. Such an immense force inspired the girl with an awe greater than she could express. No one who stood about the debris that had so lately been Mill No. 1 felt more deeply the terrible work of the explosive.

Nathalie listened attentively to all the questions and answers, but said nothing.

Philip Westland, with Ellen on his arm, came through the crowd, which made way for them, to where Edna, Nathalie and Ralph were standing. Westland had not spoken to Ralph since that night when the young man, in an ugly temper, had accused him of heartlessness, and signified his intention of quitting his roof on the following morning. As for Nathalie, he had never seen her, and did not know until that day that she had come to Riverfall. No one would have suspected, however, from witnessing the meeting, that there had been anything like strained relations between any of the party. He cordially extended his hand to Ralph, and it was as cordially grasped. Ralph introduced "My friend, Miss LaVerre." Then Ellen spoke to all of them, but especially to Miss Melbourg, to whom she had been formally presented at one of the meetings given her committee at the Agency. And, after remaining a short time longer, discussing the strange sight they had come to witness, the entire party, joined on the way by Hugh Mayfield,

walked back to the Riverfall House and entered one of the parlors.

"I have a very pleasant secret to impart to you," said Westland, when they were seated. "At least, I presume it is a secret to all except our good friend Hugh, who has already been told. It may serve to clear up some of the gloom that the occurrences of the evening have cast on this assembly. I want you all to know that the greatest happiness that can come to man is soon to be mine. Miss Eastman has promised to be my wife."

All but Hugh put on an expression of puzzled doubt.

"Miss Eastman?" queried Ralph.

"Miss Ellen Eastman," responded Westland, taking her hand, to remove all doubt as to whom he referred. "Her father, Colonel Edwin Eastman, left his fortune in my hands as trustee. His daughter supplements the trust with the more sacred one of her own dear self."

Ellen blushed, but she did not withdraw the hand he held. Edna was the first to realize the situation. She came across the room, took the face of the Marchioness between her hands, and kissed her affectionally.

"I could have wished neither of you a greater blessing," she said. "I have known Philip since I was first big enough to creep upon his lap. He is worthy of the love of any woman. As for you, Ellen, I have heard your voice only twice, but I am seldom mistaken in my impressions. You are a true woman, and only such a man as he who has won you deserves so great a treasure."

When the congratulations that followed began to subside, Ralph whispered something to Nathalie, who reddened in her turn, but offered no objection.

"As marriages seem to be in order," he said, aloud, "I

may as well announce another. Before many days Miss Nathalie LaVerre will be Mrs. Ralph Melbourg."

Westland started at the name. "Nathalie!" Could it be that Ralph had brought his little French mistress here, and allowed her to enter the company of girls like Ellen and Edna? He looked at her and became convinced that such was the probability. The next few minutes were very uncomfortable ones for him. He gave the girl his hand, as did the others. He saw Ellen draw her to her breast and imprint a kiss upon her lips! The atmosphere of the hotel parlor seemed to stifle him. He whispered to Ellen that they ought to be going, and was very thankful when he found himself with her in the cool, bracing air of the street.

"I fear," he said, as soon as they were out of hearing, "that Ralph is doing a very ill-advised thing. I have more than a suspicion that Miss LaVerre is not the kind of girl that a man should marry, or that I would like my Ellen to associate with."

She knew Nathalie's story much better than he, but she leaned a little more heavily on his arm as she asked him why. It was so pleasant to lean on that arm, and to think that it was to be her sure support through all the rest of her life. Very pleasant indeed it was to this girl, who had carried not only her own burdens but many another's almost ever since she had learned to walk!

"Why?" she asked him, looking up tenderly into his face.

"I cannot tell you," he answered. "You must not ask me too much. But I assure you, unless I am mistaken in the person, there is the strongest reasons for what I say"

She smiled winningly, and put up her disengaged hand to brush the wrinkles from his forehead.

"If you cannot tell *me*, Philip, perhaps I can tell *you*. I am not a child, and I know many things that children cannot know. I would not have spoken to you of Nathalie's life, but as you have heard something—and as you are to be my husband, from whom I shall have no secrets—I will discuss it with you. For a long time Nathalie lived with Mr. Melbourg as his mistress. That was wrong—wrong not only for her, but for him. Now they are to renew the union under the blessing of God. That is right. Whatever the world may say, I feel sure that it is right."

He shook his head doubtfully.

"It pained me to see you embrace her," he said, "when I did not think you knew. It pains me still more after what you tell me."

"Why?" she asked, again. "She is one of the sweetest little women I have ever known. She came here before the strike and went to work in the mill. Her room was opposite mine in the lodging-house. When the people left their work I assigned her to many positions of trust, and she never failed me. She told me her story, almost of her own accord. Her life as a dressmaker's apprentice in the Bowery, with no one to take an interest in her education or morals; her evenings spent at the café concerts; her meeting with Mr. Melbourg, and her speedy installation into a suite of rooms at his expense. She also told me of her regret at the false step she had made, and gave me her solemn promise to reform. That promise I have not the least doubt she has fulfilled. Now, when the man who is responsible for her fall offers to retrieve his error, who shall prevent him? Not I; nor, I think, you."

There was a charm in hearing her talk thus to him, though he could not wholly agree with her conclusions. In this ante-nuptial confidence he seemed to feel surer of the more complete union she had promised.

"Let Ralph marry her, if he chooses," said he, "though how happiness can come of it is more than I can understand. My objection was not so much as to what they might or might not do, as to your receiving such a girl on terms of intimate friendship. My wife"—he spoke the word proudly—"cannot associate with women whose names have been soiled as openly as has Nathalie's."

She felt a thrill go through her being as he spoke of her as his "wife." That sweet indefinite charm that only first love can bring! Where in all the gifts of the bountiful Creator can be found its equal?

"Your wife," she answered, "will never, so far as her ability goes, be found unworthy of you. But as long as you can meet Ralph with the cordial grasp of the hand that you gave him to-night, I can meet Nathalie with no less affection. They have sinned equally, let us say, for the sake of argument; though in my heart I believe her the more innocent of the two. Both have repented. Clear your mind, Philip, of the hard injustice that would give every chance to the man and none to the woman."

Thus talking they approached the humble lodgings which the heiress of millions still insisted on making her home. She stopped at the outer entrance to say good-night, and marked the look of surprise that he gave her.

"We are lovers now, dear," in a low voice. "The privileges we took when we were talking on business matters can no longer be claimed. The hour is too late for a visitor of your description to enter my door."

"How long will it be before I can not only enter but remain?"

"That lies with yourself," she smiled. "Have you forgotten? We are to own a controlling interest in the Riverfall mills before we can own each other."

"I shall take the early train in the morning," he said, "and lay my plans at once. If there is not enough of the stock offered in the market for our purpose I may buy up the holdings of some large owner at a fair price. This explosion to-night," he added, thoughtfully, "will probably shake the price of the stock almost as much as it did the real estate of Riverfall."

"Go," she said, tenderly, "and God be with you! I have much to do to-morrow. I must prepare a manifesto declaring my detestation of the act of this evening, and my belief that it could have been done by no friend of our movement. I shall also arrange to hold a public meeting, where similar declarations will be made. I understand that Agent Baker has begun already to issue new eviction notices. If you can secure control before he executes them it will save much suffering. If not, it is a great consolation to know that I have the means to do so much. What a pleasure it is to help people who are in want! Those whose only anxiety is to pile millions on millions through a long life can have little to soothe their latest hours. And yet, what miracles they might accomplish if they only would!"

They parted reluctantly, and Westland walked slowly back to the Riverfall House, where he learned that the friends he had left there were still occupying the parlor. Perhaps they should have been more saddened than they were at the loss that had befallen the Great Central Corporation, but they were actually holding a musicale, and seemed to be enjoying themselves very well. As Westland paused outside the door, all four were singing to an accompaniment played by Edna on her guitar, and

pleasant indeed was the melody made by the fresh young voices.

He did not like to disturb them, and he went out on the piazza to wait until their song was finished.

As he sat there in the shadow, Ralph came out with Nathalie, and walked away toward the girl's lodgings. He wondered why Mayfield lingered inside, for he knew his voice had mingled with the others. Half an hour more elapsed before he appeared, and something in his manner set Westland's thoughts into a new channel. He turned the matter over in his mind for awhile, and then began to feel sure that he had made a discovery.

Edna was alone in the parlor when he entered, and so preoccupied with her thoughts that she did not notice his presence till he stood close to her. When he took her hand in his and told her what he suspected, the tears rushed to her sightless eyes. But when he left her that night she had a smile brighter than he had ever seen upon her face—a smile of ineffable peace that followed him like a sunbeam as he went to his lonely chamber.

CHAPTER XXII.

VERY MUCH LIKE ANARCHY.

Chairman Hunt, with his teeth still chattering, found the Governor at his residence at a late hour that night, and induced him to issue orders that a detachment of militia should proceed immediately to Riverfall. The news of the demolition of Mill No. 1 had been flashed across the wire, and was common talk at the capital be-

fore he arrived. The Governor had heard of it and was, consequently, prepared to act without delay. Directions were sent to Colonel Kempton, who commanded the Second Regiment, to take five of his companies to the scene of the disaster as soon as he could get them there —his subsequent acts to be governed by his own judgment, under the general direction of the town officials.

When Chairman Hunt had finished his business it was past the hour for the last train to leave in the direction of the village over the destinies of which he was supposed to preside. Even had it not been, it is unlikely that he would have ventured to go home without a guard. His mind was full of unpleasant misgivings. He wished heartily that he had never accepted the bribes of the coterie under whose influence he had exasperated the peaceful citizens who elected him to office. He retired to a hotel and dreamed all night of fleeing before mobs who sought his life, being blown to atoms by explosives, and finding himself in other similar dreadful situations. Very early the next morning he repaired to the railroad station, where he found the militia embarking on a special train; and, making himself known to the officers, he was given a place among them.

It was a cold, crisp day and, much as the "holiday soldiers" liked the prospect of a little excursion, they wrapped themselves in their heavy overcoats, and debated the probabilities of freezing in the tents that they were to pitch on Riverfall Common. For they soon learned from Chairman Hunt that every mill—and these constituted the only unoccupied buildings in the town—was believed to be undermined with dynamite bombs, connected in some secret manner with the hiding places of conspirators, who would rather enjoy pulling the string on the least provocation. It was one thing to

charge bayonets on an unarmed crowd, and quite another to fight against an unseen foe of the potency usually ascribed to dynamite. Some of the younger members of the companies wished they had not been so fast in responding to the calls of their captains. A little judicious illness might have been worked into an excuse, and perhaps have prevented serious consequences.

Colonel Kempton was not at all the same kind of man as Colonel Caswell. While both were good soldiers, the former had an enlarged idea of what constituted discipline, and could never, even to save life, have imitated the action of his predecessor in offering his quarters to Ellen. It was well for the people of Riverfall that he had been sent on the second errand instead of the first, if he were to come there at all. Chairman Hunt gave him such an account of the ferocious character of the men with whom he would have to deal that he sent an order through the train to have every musket loaded with ball. So well was this direction executed that, before they reached their destination, several of the militiamen managed to put holes through the roofs of the cars in which they rode. And one of them had even succeeded in blowing off a thumb.

News of the expected arrival of the train had reached Agent Baker, and he was at the station pacing up and down like a caged tiger when it rolled in. As soon as Colonel Kempton could give a few general directions to his officers he accompanied Messrs. Baker and Hunt to the Agency. The fright of the town's chief official had been growing more pronounced as he approached Riverfall, and as he alighted from the train his pallor attracted sufficient attention from the few spectators present to provoke a shout of ridicule. He was an insignificant-looking man in size, and between Agent Baker and Col-

onel Kempton—both of whom were of goodly proportions —he looked more like a monkey dressed up for exhibition purposes than anything else. Somebody called out, "Look at the coward!" upon which he clung in desperate fear to the colonel's coat-tails, and besought that functionary to shoot the offender on the spot. The militia commander was inwardly disgusted at this craven act, but he concealed his repugnance as well as he was able. The instructions which he bore bade him act under the direction of the town authorities, and he was too good a soldier to be carried away by personal feeling at such a time.

As the trio ascended the street in the direction of the Agency, a parcel of small boys dogged their steps at a safe distance, shouting uncomplimentary allusions at the obnoxious chairman.

"Oh, look at little Hunt!"

"He's been aff ter git the sogers ter pertect 'im!"

"Hi! Johnny! D'ye moind th' ghost?"

"What a shmall bit of mate fer such a big sandwich!"

An orderly of the colonel's, who followed in his rear, turned several times and made a feint of attacking the lads, upon which they started to run away; but, perceiving by the merry twinkle in his eyes that he more than half sympathized with them, they returned each time to their verbal assault. When the Agency was reached, Mr. Hunt was in a state bordering on frenzy, and when the door was closed upon the annoying rabble he wiped the perspiration from his forehead, though the thermometer on the piazza registered 28° at that identical moment.

Colonel Kempton listened attentively to all that Agent Baker had to say, and there was a good deal of it. He said there was no doubt that the situation was criti al

He showed the anonymous letter which he received on the previous evening, and the colonel read it with a grave face.

"You need a few of Pinkerton's men, as well as some of the State detectives," he said. "Soldiers in uniform cannot ferret out such things as these. But there is another thing you must do without delay. Those eviction notices must come down."

Agent Baker uttered a fearful oath.

"I would see every mill in Riverfall blown to hell before I would do that!" he cried. "If I had wanted to surrender to the strikers I need never have sent for you. The notices are posted, and, by God, they shall stay posted, with another five hundred added before nightfall!"

Colonel Kempton shrugged his shoulders.

"You know your own business," said he. "If, as that note intimates, all of these mills are mined, the conspirators may decide to blow them up at once, if they are excited too much. My plan would be to temporize with an enemy of that description for the present, in order to crush him more effectually at a later day.'

As Baker was about to reply a servant came to say that there was a man in the kitchen who wished to see him without delay. In a few minutes he returned with the man, who proved to be none other than Detective Murray, of Pinkerton's, whose reputation, it is needless to say, is inferior to none on that remarkable force.

"I came to Cutlerville and rode over with two of my men," he explained, "so as not to attract attention. Several others have gone to Hosmer and will walk from there."

Mr. Baker told his story again, and when it was fin-

ished, though he had heard nothing that Colonel Kempton said, Murray came to the same conclusion.

"You must take down those notices," he said, "as soon as you can send a man around to do it."

"Never!" cried Mr. Baker.

"But you must! We need time, above all things. To provoke a dynamiter is to invite a wanton destruction of property. Give us a chance to catch the rascals, and after that you can tack up notices at your leisure. You will find but few persons in the plot. It is not the sort of scheme that a big assembly takes up. These mills cost money, and it is your duty to save them."

Agent Baker clenched his fists.

"They can be saved, if the colonel will but follow my directions," he said. "There is not a dwelling within fifty rods of the yards. March your men down the street and surround the mill property on all sides with a strong guard. Then extend your lines outward, in the direction of the corporation houses, from which the exploding apparatus would undoubtedly be worked. Get a warrant and thoroughly search all of the premises nearest the mills. Act as if you mean business and, my word for it, you will have this thing uncovered before the sun sets."

Detective Murray smiled at the impetuosity of the agent.

"That might work, and again it might not," said he. "If dynamite has really been placed under the other mills, and is to be exploded with an electrical apparatus, it is more likely to be connected with some house a mile away than with one nearer. This strike has been going on for weeks, and the plotters have had every chance. We must pare their claws by a little pretended concilia-

tion, I tell you, before we can hope to get them into our net."

Agent Baker had just begun to say, "They shall never—" when another visitor was announced. It was President Erastus Stebbins, who had read an account of the trouble in the newspaper, and taken the first train from his home for Riverfall. He looked much worried, and listened carefully to a report of the conversation that has just been recorded.

"Take down the notices?" he repeated, when Detective Murray reiterated his advice. "Certainly we will take them down! Do you think," he added, addressing Mr. Baker, "that we want to lose three or four million dollars just to gratify a little pride? The notices will come down within two hours, if I have to go and pull them down myself!"

Mr. Baker rose and struck his hand heavily upon the table.

"Then, sir, you will have to get a new agent!" he said, angrily. "I would never serve a corporation that would countenance such a dastardly deed!"

"Confound it all!" cried the president, "do you know what our stock was selling at before the opening in New York this morning? Two hundred and ninety, sir, and falling! Let another mill blow up, and it will not bring a dollar a bushel! I've got an interest in this thing, sir! Nine-tenths of all I am worth is invested here! Do you imagine I am going to beggar myself that you may gratify your temper? No, sir! The notices will come down, sir! Do you hear me? They—will—come—down!"

At the end of each of his sentences the excited president shook his fist in the direction of Mr. Baker. He did this merely to emphasize his remarks, however, and

with no belligerent intention. But the agent was as determined as his superior. Taking a piece of paper from a drawer, he wrote a hasty resignation, which Mr. Stebbins accepted without more ado. Then Mr. Baker took himself out of the room in a huff, and slammed the door after him.

"I shall run this thing myself, gentlemen," said Mr. Stebbins, to the others, "until the directors can be got together again. Give me the best advice you have, and I will follow it. That pig-headed donkey would have ruined everything in a day more."

Detective Murray looked gratified.

"Take down the notices, for the first thing," he said.

"That is also your advice?" said the president, to Colonel Kempton.

"Certainly."

Mr. Stebbins called a servant, and dispatched him for the constable who had served the papers.

"Now," said the detective, "have you a suspicion of any one?"

"Not really a suspicion," replied Mr. Stebbins. "That Baker has excited me so, I hardly know anything." He stopped to take breath. "There is a fellow who refused to obey the first notice, and held his tenement after the others left. The constable will know whom I mean. He has been described to me as a dangerous man. You might look him up. We must get out of this thing the best way we can." He paused again for breath. "I thought it cold when I came out this morning, but I begin to believe it is the hottest day I ever saw!"

Again the door-bell sounded, and shortly afterwards Ellen and Hugh was ushered into the presence of President Stebbins and the officers of the law. The beauty

and stateliness of the young "mill-girl," who was clad in a plain, dark dress, entirely devoid of ornament, impressed all three of the gentlemen, though in different proportions. Mr. Stebbins had met her before, and he introduced her to the others. Both of the visitors accepted chairs, and the president addressed his first inquiries to Mayfield.

"Is there anything you wish to say to me in private, or would you as lief these gentlemen were present? I would like them to hear it, if your errand relates to the troubles between the corporation and its late employes."

"Ellen will answer you," said Hugh, quietly.

She rose and spoke with perfect ease and fluency.

"What I came to speak about, Mr. Stebbins, does not, I believe, refer to any one of your ex-employes, but to that of which some enemy of their cause has led them to be unjustly suspected. I allude to the destruction of the mill last evening. The directors and stockholders of the corporation cannot regret that occurrence more sincerely than I. My object in coming here is to offer you my aid, representing the entire body of our people, in any way you may suggest, to ferret out the perpetrator of the outrage."

"Will you have every door opened to us without a warrant!" asked the president, cautiously.

"Every one!" she replied, with emphasis. "And the occupant of any room who refuses you the fullest opportunity to search his premises—who does not even render you aid in every possible manner—shall be denounced in the assembly as unworthy of further confidence. You will not find the author of this deed in my ranks, sir. I have preached forbearance too earnestly to have my words bring forth such fruit as this."

Detective Murray took up the anonymous letter which

Agent Baker had received, and which had been left by him on the table when he took his hasty departure.

"Do you know that handwriting?" he asked her.

A sad look came into Ellen's face as she read the note.

"I do not," she replied. "I cannot conceive how such an infamous proposition could emanate from any sane person. It is simply horrible."

The constable who had been sent for arrived at this juncture, and joined the group. He showed surprise when told that the eviction notices were to come down, but assented without comment. The oftener the notices went up and came down again the better for his fees. He never quarrelled with business.

"What was the name of that man who refused to obey the last notice?" asked Mr. Stebbins. "The one who was said to be fortified in his room?"

"William Converse," answered the constable.

"Do you know him?" inquired Mr. Stebbins of Ellen.

"Yes; but he is not under my jurisdiction. When he destroyed the notices sent out by Mr. Westland I refused to tolerate the act, and we parted."

Detective Murray went to the window and looked out. He was apparently consulting the weather signs.

"I hope it will not be inconvenient for you and Mr. Mayfield to remain here an hour or two," he said, returning. "I am an officer of the law, and I am going to search the house of this man Converse. While I have the most perfect confidence—would even be willing to risk my reputation—that neither of you are concerned in this matter, it is my opinion that you had best stay here until my return. You will be under no restraint, unless you should happen to decide to leave, in which case my assistants, who are close at hand, would prob-

ably prevent you. Colonel, if you will favor me with your company?"

President Stebbins was amazed at the cool way in which the detective made this announcement, but he said as there was no necessity for his presence at the Agency, he would also go to the village, and he followed with the constable. When they had left the house, Hugh remarked to Ellen, in a bitter tone:

"Do you realize that we are under arrest?"

"Yes," she smiled.

"And you do not care!" he exclaimed, in astonishment.

"No. The arrest of an innocent person carries with it no disgrace. I only hope they will unearth the parties who blew up the mill."

Hugh looked at her with a troubled face.

"Supposing it should be Converse?"

She started at that, but said if it were he must pay the penalty.

"If you knew it were he," cried Hugh, "would you help these hounds of the law to apprehend him? This man, whose life has been a curse to him ever since he saw the first cloudy day of existence! Would you not warn and help him to escape? Or, if taken, would you not defend him?"

"No, I would not!"

"*I* would!" said Hugh. "I would aid him to the last drop of my blood!"

She trembled. He had never spoken to her like this before.

"Do you think it was he?" she asked.

"I fear it."

She paced the room for several minutes [illegible].

"Do you recall that last night when Converse and I

remained after the assembly? The night he advocated meeting force with force—and I listened—and how much it disturbed me?"

He assented.

"Hugh, at that time I escaped a great danger. A little more and I might have fallen into the snare. You are passing through the same experience. Be careful you are not led too far!"

The cloud did not lift from his thoughtful face.

"There is a limit to endurance," he said, gloomily. "I am sorry—yes, I am sure I am sorry—that the mill was destroyed. I am equally sure I would save the man who did it, if I could get between him and the law. When we leave here I shall try my best to discover him, and if I am successful, I will assist his escape if I can. They would sentence him to long years in prison—to the gibbet, for all I know. This punishment he would bear for his zeal in *our* behalf, for his attempt to cripple *our* enemies. Oh, Ellen, do you really hope they will find him, when you know how terrible must be his fate?"

She felt the necessity of firmness, though her woman's heart quaked within her.

"Yes," she said.

"Even if it should be Converse?"

"Yes, Hugh. Even if it were *you*?"

He leaned back in his chair.

"Or Philip Westland?" he said, gutterally.

She placed a hand over her left breast, and grew whiter.

"Philip could not do such a thing," she said, proudly.

"Nor could I," he responded. "And yet you mentioned me."

The theme was becoming too painful to continue, and they dropped it by common consent. Little more was said until the return of President Stebbins and Detective Murray.

"I shall have to keep you under surveillance a while longer, I am sorry to say," said the officer, addressing Hugh. "You may take your choice between this house and the jailor's parlor. All we want is to have you handy." Then, turning to Ellen, he added, "You are at liberty, madam, and I am very sorry if you have been incommoded by the delay."

Mayfield looked like a thunder-cloud about to burst.

"I demand to know on what charge you propose to hold me!"

"Anything you like to call it," responded the detective, cheerily. "Perhaps we may make it more definite in the morning, and perhaps by that time we may be ready to let you go. It won't do any good to get riled. Which is it, here or the jail?"

Hugh curbed his indignation as well as he could, out of regard to the pleading look that Ellen gave him.

"The jail, by all means!" he said. "If I am to be a prisoner, keep me where prisoners are kept. I have lived an honest life for twenty-four years. I fear to tell no man any act I have committed. Ellen, you will tell the people that he brings no charge against me. I am ready, sir."

He walked off with the officer, and Ellen went to her home. Two of the detectives had been hidden in the room next to that which Ralph and Ellen occupied at the Agency, and had overheard every word of their conversation. On hearing their report, Mr. Murray had reached the decision that it would be wise to lock Hugh up until he was through with the searching process.

They had found nothing in the room occupied by Converse. According to instructions, the constable went ahead and removed the notice from the door. Upon hearing the noise, the Englishman came out to inquire the cause, and when he learned it he grinned with satisfaction. Detective Murray and an assistant came upon him suddenly, and took him by the shoulders.

"We are going to search these premises for unlawful articles," said the detective, "and you may as well submit quietly."

"Search all you like," was the unexpected reply, "and if you want any help call on me."

They inspected the room, and after that the entire building, without avail. When they came away, Converse was grinning more frightfully than when they arrived.

"Sorry to have troubled you," said Mr. Murray, laconically.

"Don't mention it," grinned Converse. "Come again. Come often. I shall always be glad to see you."

His grin seemed to follow them to the street, and the last they saw of him he stood in his doorway, with his mouth stretched sardónically.

In an hour every person in Riverfall knew that Hugh was under arrest, but Ellen's influence prevented any demonstration. The soldiers were placed in the vicinity of the mills and other points of interest. At two o'clock every eviction notice was down, to the general joy, and the danger of another explosion was believed to be temporarily past. But later in the afternoon a boy left a note for President Stebbins that made that gentleman seek out Detective Murray with all speed. This is what was in the message:

"If Hugh Mayfield is not set free before the clock strikes seven, another of your mills will go into the air. A word to the wise is sufficient. JUSTICE."

A comparison of the missive with the one previously received showed that it was in the same handwriting.

"We must let him out," said Mr. Murray, grinding his teeth," but we will have him shadowed every second. Damn it, Mr. Stebbins, this looks very much like anarchy!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHERE WAS NATHALIE?

The dreaded hour of seven passed, and no other mill in Riverfall was shattered. It was evident that the dynamiters were well informed of what was going on. Hugh Mayfield, when released from prison—where, in spite of his request to be placed in a cell, he had only been allowed to occupy the jailor's sitting-room—exhibited himself freely in the village. The property-destroyers were evidently men of their word. They could be dealt with on an understood basis. The thing that most annoyed President Stebbins was that he could never tell what their next demand might be. True, the volcano, for the moment, was not emitting fire; but the knowledge that it might do so at the fancy of some concealed foe, and that the possessions of the Great Central Corporation were liable to be buried at any time in its stream of lava, was not cheerful, to say the least.

The temporary needs of the strikers were met by fre-

quent openings of Ellen's plethoric purse, and so long as the corporation houses could be retained by them no actual suffering was likely to arise. The mills were guarded by a cordon of military at all hours, though for what purpose it would be difficult to say, since the enemy they were intended to combat was of the invisible kind, and one whose advance guard was already with the breastworks. A dozen Pinkerton men were scattered about the village, but attracted no attention among the crowd of sight-seers who flocked in on every train. The militiamen shivered at night in their tents on the Common, and by day as they paced up and down before the deserted mills.

Detective Murray had Converse shadowed at all hours by three of his best men. The Englishman never left his room that one of these was not on his trail. At the same time a minute examination of the earth in the vicinity of the mills was made in the endeavor to discern any disturbance that might indicate an underground connection. But, with all these pains, nothing of value was discovered.

As evening approached, Detective Murray conceived a bold plan. Ellen had called a meeting of the ex-employes in the largest hall in the place. Murray procured the requisite warrant from a local justice, and had every soldier present sworn in as a peace officer. When the meeting was in progress three hundred militiamen surrounded the building in which it was being held, and Colonel Kempton, walking into the hall, declared every person present under arrest. There was a moment of consternation, followed by symptoms of an outbreak, and then Ellen's voice was heard. They would submit to the authority of the law, she said. No force would be required. She bade the officer do his duty. Colonel

Kempton replied that he merely wished to prevent those present from leaving until the close of an investigation that was in progress, and advised all to be at their ease.

Within half an hour President Stebbins, who was at the Agency anxiously awaiting the result of this move, received a third letter, delivered by a small boy, who was collared and brought into his presence. The little fellow said the note had been handed to him by a stranger, who had given him twenty-five cents to do the errand. Though it was evident that the boy told the truth, a detective who was in the house decided to detain him while Mr. Stebbins went as fast as his legs would carry him in search of Colonel Kempton.

The note read as follows:

"It is now half-past nine o'clock. If the persons held in Riverfall Hall are not released at half-past ten, another mill will go down; and so on—one each hour—till all are set free. JUSTICE."

On learning that Mr. Stebbins wished to see him, Colonel Kempton descended to the street, and there read the note. Detective Murray, who was close at hand, started off with the two gentlemen, and was also made acquainted with its contents. He was nonplussed.

"We have settled one thing," said the colonel. "The author of this note is not one of the persons in the hall, and every man whom we have had under special suspicion is there, including Converse."

Detective Murray heard him, and said he was not so sure about that.

"But there is one thing we can prove, Mr. Stebbins," he said, "if you are willing to run the risk. It is possible that this anonymous threatener is frightening us unduly. It may be that he has no other mill undermined,

and is unable to carry out his promises. If we were to refuse to release these people until after the hour he specifies, we could tell hereafter how much confidence to place in him. It might be a costly piece of information, and—mind you—I don't advise it, but I would give a good deal to know, for all that."

President Stebbins turned pale at the suggestion.

"Good Heaven!" he cried, "these mills cost a quarter of a million apiece! You must release the people in the hall as soon as you can get there. I could never take a risk like that! It would mean absolute ruin if we were wrong!"

After a little further talk Colonel Kempton returned to the hall, and announced that all present were free to go at their pleasure. As he did so he glanced at Converse, who sat facing him in one of the side aisles, and saw the broad grin of the morning repeated on his face. It was a grin of triumph, of victory won over an enemy, and the colonel felt convinced beyond doubt that this man knew the whole secret of the plot. He lingered, the meeting being a public one, and heard Ellen close her remarks with these words:

"Yes, my friends, you have still left the most potent weapon for your deliverance—the ballot. You have only to unite, and next Tuesday a friend of equal rights and justice will be chosen to represent Riverfall at the State House. What to you are the great parties of the country, the caucuses of which have already nominated candidates for your suffrages? Which of them has dared to curb the insolence of Capital, or made endurable the lot of Labor? We worked in these mills for just enough to keep soul and body together, and when we could bear it no longer, what had they to offer us—a bayonet! Republican or Democrat—call them what

you will—they are alike insensible to the growing needs of the people. Let us send from Riverfall a man whose entire energies will be devoted to our cause—a man whom we know and honor, and in whom we have the fullest confidence. You all know whom I mean—Hugh Mayfield!"

A shout arose at the name, but Hugh stopped it by a wave of his hand, as he arose and stepped upon the platform.

"For this kindness on the part of the leader whom we all revere (he bowed toward Ellen), and for your approbation, my friends, let me return my thanks. In anything by which I can serve my associates I hope never to be found derelict. If I believed that I could do you as much good in the Legislature as you appear to suppose, I would not rise, as I now do, to decline the use of my name. But, my comrades, I am only a poor spinner, lacking the graces and accomplishments indispensable to success in such a position. My voice would be a very feeble one among so many abler and wiser men. You have in your ranks another who—if his professions are to be relied upon—has your interests at heart, and who has ten times my capacity to aid you in securing the legislation you seek. I wish therefore to withdraw my name, and to substitute that of Philip Westland."

There were shouts of mingled approval and disapproval, when Ellen's voice was again heard.

"Mr. Westland is not a legal resident of this State, and is consequently ineligible to office here. Has any one a candidate to propose other than Mr. Mayfield? (No response.) As many as are in favor of his being the nominee will say Aye." A shout arose that shook the building. "Those opposed will say No." A dead

silence fell on the assembly. "It is a vote. Hugh Mayfield is your candidate. See to it that he is elected, or never again complain of the unfair laws that now govern you."

The meeting then adjourned, and the audience crowded around Hugh to congratulate him and to proffer their support. He shook his head doubtfully, saying that they must not expect too much from one so inexperienced. Colonel Kempton left the hall with a feeling of disgust. If such ignorant men as these were to make the laws, he thought, the country would soon be unfit for a gentleman to live in.

Ralph Melbourg went to the meeting that night, and looked all over the throng in a vain hope to find his sweetheart somewhere in its midst. When the exercises began and he made sure she was not present, he went out and walked down to her room in the corporation lodging-house. Her door was locked, and at the discovery an unpleasant sensation came over him. He next went to the Riverfall House, where he found Edna, who tried to entertain him, but found it difficult to do so. He wanted Nathalie, and nothing else could fill her place.

He strolled out after awhile and tried Nathalie's door again. Then he went back to the hall and found it invested by soldiers, who would let no one enter or depart. That was a very strange thing, but no stranger than his sweetheart's absence. Where could she have gone? He began to get alarmed.

He paced the streets, asking many persons whom he met whether they had seen her. Then he went back to the hall, and saw the people leaving it in a great swarm. Waiting near the entrance he noticed each face as it passed him, for there was still a chance that she might

have been inside and escaped his vision. When the last one had departed he went in and looked at the empty seats. A chill came over him. He decided to go and ask Ellen when she had last seen her.

The Marchioness was at home, and he heard a pleasant "Come in," in response to his knock. She was alone, reading for the tenth time a letter received from Philip, the first real love-letter she had ever had. He was detained in the city on the business that took him there, and might have to stay a day or two longer. He said every hour away from her seemed like a year, and all that sort of thing. Sensible business men act very much like ordinary people when writing to their sweethearts.

"Good evening, Mr. Melbourg," said Ellen.

"Have you seen Nathalie to-night?" he asked, breathlessly. "I cannot find her anywhere."

She smiled into his anxious eyes. She knew now, better than ever before, how to appreciate his nervousness.

"Let us see if I have better luck," she responded.

Leading him into the hallway, she lifted the latch of the door opposite her own, and stepped into the room. The sought for girl came forward to meet her, but changed color at sight of her lover.

"Where have you been?" he asked, hurriedly. "I have hunted for you since eight o'clock."

She looked so distressed that Ellen came to the rescue.

"You missed quite an adventure by not coming to the meeting," she said. "We were all arrested, and kept under guard for nearly an hour."

"I—I meant to go, stammered the girl, "but I—I fell asleep. I—I was very—tired."

Ralph did not look pleased.

"And you were asleep—in here—when I came to the

door twice and knocked! You must have slept soundet than you used, for I made an awful racket."

The French girl blushed violently.

"She has sat up late for some time now," said Ellen, in extenuation. "Since Miss Flaherty went away she has had no one to set her a good example in relation to retiring early. I have heard her moving about till past midnight often."

Nathalie tried to look grateful for the sympathy, but the words in which it was uttered did not set her at ease.

"Why did they arrest you?" she asked, to divert the conversation into a more agreeable channel.

"I do not know why," said Ellen, "but I have learned the reason we were released. President Stebbins received an anonymous letter threatening to destroy another mill within an hour if they did not let us go. I wish I knew who does these things," she added, very seriously. "I could almost take him to the police-station with my own hands."

The color left Nathalie's face, and it grew paler than the ceiling of the room.

"They have kept the mill-owners from turning us out of doors again," she ventured.

"Yes," retorted Ellen, "and they have taken from us what public endorsement we had gained. I do not believe one of my people would do a thing so utterly opposed to all my teachings, but we get the credit for it, just the same. I told Hugh yesterday that if I knew who it was—even if it were himself—I would denounce him!"

After saying this, Ellen returned to her own apartments leaving the lovers together.

"You are not well," said Ralph. "I am sorry I spoke

impatiently. One could tell to look at you that you needed rest. You had best go to sleep again as soon as possible."

She wound her arms about his neck in the good-night kiss. She was much agitated, though striving with all her power to conceal her feelings.

"You are trembling," he said.

"Am I?" she answered. "I think I have taken cold." She paused a moment, and then burst out, "Dear Ralph, would you care very much if I were DEAD?"

He took her face between his hands, and looked at her.

"See here!" he exclaimed. "You want a doctor!"

"No, Ralph, I am only tired—and—and nervous. Leave me and I will go to bed. To-morrow I shall be well again."

If she had feared it would be the last kiss he would ever give her it could not have been more lovingly received.

"Good-night," he said, "and be careful. You are to be my wife very soon now, you know."

"Good-night, darling!"

He thought he would go to his room, but something had made him nervous, too, and he tried to dispel the feeling by pacing up and down the sidewalks. Half an hour after he left Nathalie he found himself in the vicinity of her lodgings, and while he stood looking up at her darkened window he saw a little figure, muffled in hood and veil, open the door, glance cautiously in both directions, and then start off at a brisk pace.

It was Nathalie beyond question, and he was not a moment in deciding to follow her. There was something mysterious in such a sally as this, when he had just left her with a promise that she would at once retire. Ralph's jealousy was aroused. He walked along in the

shadow until he saw the figure he was watching pause in front of the Riverfall House, take another cautious glance around, and enter at the side door.

It was nearly midnight. Ralph waited a little while, and then went into the office of the hotel. A dollar slipped quietly into the hand of the night boy elicited the information that the young lady who had just arrived had gone directly to the rooms occupied by Miss Melbourg. The lover's jealous feelings were calmed, but his curiosity did not abate. What could Nathalie want of Edna at that hour?

He cautioned the boy not to mention his visit, and went back into the street to watch and wait. He did not believe the girl would stay very long, and he determined to see the end of the strange affair. Nearly two hours passed, and he was about ready to give up the investigation when the door at which Nathalie had entered the hotel opened softly, and—not one figure, but two—stepped forth. He knew the second figure was Edna, and his wonder increased. He saw them start off together and was about to follow, when a new surprise greeted him.

A man, evidently on the same quest as himself, came out of a hiding-place and began to shadow the couple. Ralph, with the utmost care to avoid discovery, began to shadow the man. And in this manner, watching and being watched, the strange quartette pursued their way through the semi-darkness.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DYNAMITE PLOT.

The reader might as well be told the truth about Nathalie, if he has not already guessed it, with that shrewd sense which in these days baffles much more ingenious novelists than the one who pens these lines. The little French girl had lent herself to the schemes of the dynamiters, being persuaded by them that a wholesome display of force was needed to strike terror into the flinty hearts of the mill-directors. It had been a hard struggle, but she had succumbed. In her they had secured a most valuable ally, as will be seen when one or two things are taken into account.

She was a woman, to begin with, and when once engaged in a plot, women are more trustworthy than men. She could not be bribed. She had more than the average intelligence. Then her room was in the same building with Ellen's, and in case of a general search almost every house in Riverfall would be looked into before that one, as the Marchioness was known to disapprove so strongly of lawlessness.

Well knowing Ellen's publicly-expressed views, Nathalie was some time in making up her mind to enter a scheme so totally at variance with them; but she was finally convinced that, while Ellen could not openly endorse the destruction of a mill or two, she and all of the other strikers would be sure to profit vastly by it. "Unless," said her tempters, "something startling is soon done, the new agent will order us all out of doors, and we cannot hope for clemency next time. If we can hold

this fear over his head, we can gain a more attentive hearing."

The dynamite was placed under every mill owned by the corporation, and the electric connections were made before Nathalie was consulted. Then it was the work of but a few days—or rather nights—to arrange the key-board under the floor of one of her closets, where only the most diligent search would be likely to discover it. Nothing was required of the girl except to press a given key upon receiving the signal, and instantly the particular mill with which it was connected would be destroyed. When Mill No. 1 was wrecked she experienced a shock, but the effects soon wore off. It is one of the peculiar things in the human make-up that the most awful events lose their significance if dwelt upon persistently. Nathalie was much more willing to press the key that connected her with Mill No. 2 than she had been the first one. She realized now how potent was the power she held in her hands—how it could make the haughty capitalist pause in his cruel work, and bring even the representatives of the civil and military forces to their knees! Hiding in the room that evening, with not a light to betray her presence, she almost hoped the signal would be given to explode the second charge, and there was a sentiment of disappointment when the time passed without the warning. Such is the fascination of a secret mission to a susceptible mind!

But the remarks that Ellen let fall when she and Ralph called produced a revolution in Nathalie's mind. That plain, direct statement of her superior, that she would denounce the dynamiters, could she find them, even if one were Hugh, produced a strong effect. The girl became as anxious to retrace her steps as she had previously been to take them. But how to go to work was

the question. She had a well-grounded fear of her associates in the plot. She believed, should they detect her in playing them false, they would kill her without scruple. Some way must be devised which would convey a belief that she was innocent. When Ralph left, she thought the matter over, and could see but one feasible method.

She must penetrate into Mill No. 7, where the main connections were laid, and cut the wires!

The streets in the vicinity of the mills were patroled with soldiers, but Mill No. 7 could be entered from the waterside with a boat, under cover of the darkness. It was a bold scheme for a young girl to undertake, but Nathalie nerved herself to make the attempt. She did not like to go alone, however, and she feared to take a confidant in so important a matter. While striving to overcome the difficulty caused by this situation, she suddenly thought of Edna.

The blind girl would do anything for her friend. Of that she felt sure. To ask her to accompany her on such a mission was to put her friendship to a severe test, but Nathalie believed she would go. Midnight is not so different from noon, when one is sightless. She could tell Edna some simple tale to account for the journey, and though she were present when the wires were cut, she could never testify in relation to it, if worse came to worst. Yes, Miss Melbourg must be persuaded, if possible, and if that failed, Nathalie must go alone. She was determined.

Edna was ready for bed when the French girl called, and was considerably surprised at the visit. It was some time before Nathalie could bring herself to make the proposal for which she came, but she did at last.

"Edna, dear, would you mind going out for a little walk with me?"

"Where?" asked Edna, in a tone of surprise.

"I cannot tell you that. I know it seems strange, but I am obliged to do a very particular errand, and I hate to go alone. It is a secret—what I am going to do—and I know you will not ask questions. Now, dear, wrap yourself up and come."

Edna looked disturbed.

"A secret?" she repeated. "Is it perfectly right? Ah! Perhaps it is something for Ellen?"

"Yes," said Nathalie, catching eagerly at the thought. "It is something that she wants done very much, but you must never breathe a word of it, even to her. I am supposed to go alone, but—I dislike to—and you will not tell any one, I am sure."

The authority of Ellen's name settled all doubts that had arisen in Miss Melbourg's mind, and she prepared to accompany her friend, dressing warmly and putting rubbers on her feet, according to directions. Mollie was sound asleep, and there seemed no occasion to disturb her. The girls believed that no one saw them leave the house. They took a long and circuitous route, in order to avoid the patrol. Having gone nearly a quarter of a mile toward the country, they passed through a gate into a field, and pursued their way by a footpath to the other side of the town, near the mills. Reaching the river-side, Nathalie took one of several boats which were tied along the shore, and, after pushing it out where it would float, assisted Edna to a seat in it.

"We must not speak above a whisper," she said, in the tone indicated. "Keep perfectly quiet, and all will be well."

It did not occur to the blind girl that she was running

a great risk. She had perfect confidence in her companion, and did not doubt that she was carrying out explicit directions given her by Ellen. The boat was easily propelled to the rear of the mill, with hardly a perceptible sound. Nathalie had been rowing a number of times since the strike began, and was used to handling the oars. Arriving at the point which she wished to reach, she stepped ashore, fastened the boat, and assisted Edna to land. Then, walking like cats across the few feet of intervening space, they opened a small door and entered the building.

It was almost as dark as pitch indoors, but Nathalie found a seat for Edna near the entrance, and whispering a warning not to move till her return, stole softly across the great floor toward a stairway that led to the basement. Creeping through the blackness she found the place where the wires were hid and, after lighting a match to make sure, cut the entire connection with a heavy pair of shears that she carried in her pocket. When this was accomplished without accident, she experienced a feeling of relief, but at the same moment became aware of the intense strain under which she was laboring. Her strength gave way so rapidly that she was obliged to rest on the lower step of the stairs before she could ascend.

While waiting there, she heard a piercing scream from above, and experienced a new terror in the knowledge that something had happened to cause alarm to Miss Melbourg.

The figure that Ralph had followed was that of Ezra Baker, the mill-agent. Coming home late from a visit to a lady friend, he had perceived the two girls as they left the Riverfall House and, easily recognizing them, decided to ascertain what took them into the streets at

such an unusual hour. It did not occur to him that another might also be shadowing them, and he was quite lost in his desire to see the end of their expedition. When they neared Mill No. 7 he grew confident that the journey had something to do with the dynamite plot, and his joy at the prospect of being able to unravel that mystery was great. He stole along, at a reasonable distance, keeping in the shadows, but never letting the girls get out of his sight for many seconds at a time. When they took the boat he waited until they had floated for some distance down the stream before he took another to follow them. He seemed so near a great discovery that he deemed it prudent to use the utmost caution.

When he saw Nathalie's boat tied to a post on the bank, he rowed his own a little below it, and fastened it in a sheltered place, where it would not attract attention. Then, with a step like that of a jaguar, he crept to the door where the girls had entered, and softly stole inside.

Edna was sitting, as has already been stated, upon a bench near the entrance. Her abnormally quick senses advised her that a third person had entered the building, but she had no way of determining whether it were dark enough for her to escape detection if she remained motionless. It was really impossible to see anything, and had she not moved she would have been unnoticed longer than she was. But, hearing the approach of the cat-like steps, Edna thought her own safety, and that of Nathalie, demanded that she move farther away, and, if possible, toward the stairs by which she knew her friend had descended. Could she pass down those stairs undetected she might be able to warn the French girl, and secure a hiding-place for both until the danger was over.

Baker heard the light steps moving from him and

feeling sure that they must be those of one of the women, hastened toward them. As he reached her, Edna's foot hit against some obstruction, and she fell headlong. In the darkness the agent fell also, and at this moment she uttered the scream she could no longer restrain.

Ralph was not three minutes behind Baker, whose form he recognized as he saw him take the oars of the second boat. Skiffs were plenty, and the young man moored his above the others, as soon as he saw Baker enter the mill. He had no definite idea what was being done, but he did not propose to leave the man alone in that building with his cousin and sweetheart, no matter what crime they might intend to commit. Thus it happened that when Nathalie heard Edna's cry, there were four persons inside the building instead of two.

The sound of his cousin's voice, raised to a pitch that denoted fright, startled Ralph. He quickly decided that he would, at all risks, know what was going on, and a second later he took a match from his pocket and struck it. As he held the light above his head he could make out the prostrate figures, and he knew them both. But where was Nathalie?

"Release that lady!" he said, in low but perfectly distinct tones. "Release her, Agent Baker, or it will be worse for you!"

He found a small gas-jet as he spoke, and lit it. It produced a very dim light, but sufficient for Ralph to distinguish the objects he needed to see.

Mr. Baker arose and came toward him.

"So you are in this plot, too, are you?" he muttered. "Your neck will be liable to stretch for this—unless—" he hesitated, "unless you make friends with me."

Miss Melbourg came and stood behind her cousin, feel-

ing her way as is the custom of the blind, all the while trembling visibly.

"If friendship with an assailant of the defenceless is needed to insure my neck, it certainly will stretch," sneered the young man, looking at the other with unconcealed aversion. "What do you mean by attacking my cousin in this savage manner?"

The agent eyed him scornfully.

"You talk glibly," he said, "but before I answer that, perhaps you will tell me what brings you here at this hour of the night. Remember, I stand upon property that is in my own control."

"I came to watch *you!*" retorted Ralph. "I saw you creeping after these girls, and I knew you too well to believe that it was with any good object!"

"Indeed! And now I would like to know what *they* are doing here."

"They can speak for themselves."

"Yes; and they shall!" cried Baker. "They are here on some mission for the men who blew up the other mill, and you are most likely their abettor. Let me but raise the alarm and I will have you all under lock and key, to prove your innocence, if you can, before judge and jury. It must be evident to you that you are in my power. And yet," pausing again, "I have a proposition to make."

Edna touched Ralph on the shoulder, and spoke in a shaking voice.

"Listen to him, Ralph, and let us escape from here if we can. I have done no wrong and know of none, but I am willing—if he demands it—to pay him something for his silence."

Mr. Baker heard the sweet voice, and found a charm in it.

"But would you pay the price I ask, pretty one?" he said. "I do not wish to harm you. Will you pay a price that shall release you and your friends from the present peril, and allow you to go as silently as you came?"

Ralph started to interrupt, but the girl begged him to have patience for a moment longer.

"What is your price, sir?" she queried.

"That," he said, "I must tell to you alone. If you will take ten steps with me I will inform you of my conditions."

Against her cousin's hearty protest the blind girl complied with the mill-agent's suggestion.

Nathalie had heard the voices and distinguished Ralph's tones. As Edna went aside with Baker she came up the stairway and, guided by the dim light, found her way to her lover and fell on her knees.

"Oh, Ralph! Leave here as soon as you can get away! Take Edna with you, and let me perish as I deserve! She did not know where I was going, nor what I intended to do. Take the boat without delay, I entreat you!"

Then she sought Mr. Baker, and clasped her hands imploringly.

"It is not their fault, sir!" she said. "It is all my own. Call the officers and bid them arrest me. I will be very quiet and go where you please. Believe me—by the soul of my mother!—they are not to blame!"

But the agent would not listen to her. He was pouring into Edna's ear, with all the eloquence of which he was capable, the dangers to which she exposed herself and friends if she refused his offer. She was at first too stupefied to reply, and he mistook her silence for partial consent.

"We will go at once to Europe," he said. "We will travel around the globe. Say but the one little word, and you shall all leave here as free as you came."

In the meantime Ralph was talking to Nathalie, who had gone back to him.

"Rash girl, what devil persuaded you to join in such a deed? For it is now plain what brought you here. Had you no pity on those who loved you that you would expose them to such contempt—if not positive danger—as this night's work will do?"

She looked the picture of woe.

"I came here to save the mill, Ralph, not to destroy it! I have just cut the wires, so that nobody can injure it hereafter. Don't speak so cruelly. I feel cold. It seems as if I were dying."

Then Ralph heard Edna.

"Give me a little time to think," she was saying. "It is so sudden."

"Not an hour," replied Baker. "Not a minute. Is it yes or no?"

The words, but especially the tone in which they were uttered, roused Ralph's suspicions.

"What does he demand?" he asked, going to where she stood and encircling her with his arm. She held down her head, but Baker raised his and looked at the young man insolently.

"I offered her my hand in marriage."

Ralph took two steps toward him, and shook his fist in the agent's face.

"You dog—you worse than beast," he cried, "you shall answer to me for that insult!"

His eyes glared like those of a bloodhound, and the agent did not wish a personal contest with a man so infuriated, even though his form might appear slighter

than his own. He retreated toward the gas-jet, and with a quick motion, extinguished it. Then, having previously taken his bearings, he made his way as expeditiously as he could toward the door at the waterside.

As soon as he could do so, Ralph relit the gas and prepared to assist the girls to depart. Though he was quite out of patience with Nathalie, he saw that she would need his aid if she were to escape Mr. Baker's vengeance, to which he had no intention of leaving her. But at that moment several windows on the opposite side of the mill were broken with a terrific crash. Ralph saw the gleaming barrels of a dozen muskets, and heard a sonorous voice give the command, "*Fire!*"

It was all done so quickly that he had neither time to save himself nor to warn his companions. A sheet of flame burst forth, and he saw Nathalie lying on the mill floor, pale and still.

In a moment more a group of soldiers was in the place. Ralph and Edna were grasped by rough hands, and Detective Murray was bending over the form on the floor.

"It is the little French girl," he said to a subordinate. "Go to her house, O'Hara, and make a thorough search. And you, Carmody, take a look at the lodgings where young Melbourg has been staying. Step lively, now! We shall have the whole thing in our hands if you are wide awake!"

Ralph, closely watched by his guards, knelt at Nathalie's side, and clasped one of her white hands in his own.

"For God's sake, go for a surgeon!" he pleaded. "She is not—she cannot be dead! Do not touch her till a physician comes! The last words she heard me speak were uttered in unkindness. Get help that she

may at least arouse herself enough to say she forgives me!"

Detective Murray dispatched a messenger as requested. The grief that Ralph displayed affected all who stood near.

"Why are you so troubled?" inquired Murray, thinking the incident a strange one. "What is the girl to you?"

"She was to be my wife."

Ralph kissed the quiet features as he spoke. He did not care who saw him. Never till now had he realized how dear that child had grown.

Edna knelt by his side and touched the face.

"She still lives," she whispered. "I am sure a surgeon can save her."

Colonel Kempton, who had been hastily summoned from his bed, now joined the group.

"Mr. Melbourg," he said, "this is sad business."

"She was trying to save the mill," said Ralph, raising his eyes to the colonel. "I do not understand it very well, as I came late, but she told me she knew where the wires were, and had cut them. They must be in the basement, as she had just come from there. I saw Agent Baker following these girls here, and I shadowed him. This lady is my cousin, and is blind. She says she did not know the object of Nathalie's errand, and I am sure she speaks the truth."

"Where is Mr. Baker?"

"He went out at that door just before the firing."

Detective Murray sent for a lantern and, with one of his men, explored the basement. They were not long in discovering the cut wires, and they saw with satisfaction that the electric connection was thoroughly broken.

Dr. McNally arrived while this being done and, after

an examination agreed with Edna that life still existed in Nathalie's body.

"She should be taken to some quiet place where she can have the best of care," he said. "If that is done she has a fair chance to recover. The only wound is this one in the right shoulder, but she has had a severe nervous shock. Where shall she be taken?" he asked.

"To my room," said a voice.

It was Ellen, who had entered the mill unperceived.

"That will be excellent," said the doctor, and immediately dispatched a boy who had come with him for a carriage.

"We will see what Mr. Murray says to that," said one of the Pinkerton men.

Murray was feeling well. He believed the danger to the Riverfall mills was over, and his face bore a satisfied expression as he came up the stairs.

"I wish to have this nearly murdered girl taken to my room," said Ellen to him. "She cannot move without assistance, but if you think necessary you can station a guard at my door. You cannot object to her recovering, if it is possible."

"On the contrary," he replied, "I shall do everything I can to restore her. But, madam, I think one of the jailor's chambers will answer quite as well as yours. We will have her sent to the jail, if you please, doctor. And, for the present, at least, this lady and gentleman (indicating Ralph and Edna) must go with her."

Ellen put her arms about Edna's neck and kissed her, while she tried to console Ralph with a few words of cheer

"I do not know what they intend to charge you with," she said, "but I am sure it must be bailable. I shall tel-

egraph at once for Mr. Westland. Dear little Nathalie, I pray God her hurt is not fatal!"

The carriage soon arrived, and willing hands lifted the still quiet burden into it. As the distance was so short, the other two prisoners expressed a willingness to walk, and in a brief time all were inside the iron gates.

The jailor asked Detective Murray whether anyone was to be allowed to hold converse with the captives.

"Not a soul, unless I am present," he replied. "Let no one go near them but your own trusted assistants."

He next sought Colonel Kempton.

"Double your guard at Mill No. 7," he said, "and on no account let any person enter the premises. Put part of your patrol in boats and bid them watch the river. Tell them to report anything unusual, and arrest every person who gives the least cause for suspicion."

"It shall be done," said the colonel, and he went to give the necessary orders.

CHAPTER XXV.

MR. STEBBINS SELLS HIS STOCK.

Before Philip Westland finished his breakfast the next morning he was given a telegram from Ellen, and as soon as steam could carry him to Riverfall he was there. Ellen met him at the station and, as they proceeded to the village, she told him as briefly as possible the events of the preceding night.

"I do not quite understand it all yet," she said. "Nathalie knew where to cut the wires, but whether she

learned it accidently or otherwise I am uncertain. She probably took Edna merely for company, hesitating to undertake such a journey alone. When Ralph entered the mil. and found Baker there he lit the gas, which naturally attracted the attention of the guard. Detective Murray and Colonel Kempton were sent for in haste, and nobody would have been injured but for the impetuosity of a sergeant, who claims that he thought the people inside were about to explode a charge of dynamite, and that quick action was necessary. I have told the justice of the district court that you will furnish bail and he is waiting for you, with Mr. and Miss Melbourg."

They found the court-room crowded, and the judge almost overcome by the sudden importance that had been achieved by himself and his position. In response to questions he said he had decided to require $10,000 bail from each of the defendants present, and $20,000 for the third one. Westland spoke briefly in answer:

"We can easily furnish the bonds that your honor requires, but we do not like to be placed in the position of criminals, unless some sort of proof appears against us. I hardly know yet of what we are accused."

"Of aiding and abetting a conspiracy to destroy the mills of Riverfall," answered Detective Murray, to whom the justice turned.

"How? By cutting the wires that made such destruction possible? Or by being present when this was being done, not knowing what was going on? For these, I learn, are all that my friends are guilty of doing."

"I shall submit no evidence at this time," said Mr. Murray, 'but I insist on substantial bonds. We will try your 'friends,' Mr. Westland, in a court that has jurisdiction over felonies."

To this Westland answered, "Very well," and withdrew

further objection. Bonds were signed and the released prisoners went at once with him and Ellen to the jail, where, upon displaying the necessary papers, they were admitted.

Nathalie lay in the jailor's best bed, still unconscious. Dr. McNally allowed the visitors to look at her, and then took them into another room and closed the door.

"It would be very dangerous to attempt her removal," he said. "She hovers between life and death. The slightest thing may turn the scale. If you can make arrangements with the jailor, you had best let her remain here."

Ralph whispered to the others and then went to see the jailor. Money is not so bad a pleader, sometimes, and he had little difficulty in securing leave to have the girl cared for in the keeper's private rooms until her recovery. Ellen and anyone else who was desired were to have free access to the place. When Ralph returned and told of his success, all expressed gratification.

"You will do everything possible, Dr. McNally," said Ralph, "and look to me for your compensation. That bit of girlhood in there is more to me than all else in this world."

Ellen and the young man remained at the jail for the present, and Westland undertook to guide Edna back to the hotel. Outside the prison gate they found Hugh Mayfield waiting for the latest news in reference to the injured girl.

"I am going to escort Miss Melbourg to the Riverfall House," said Westland, when he had told his story. "You must excuse me, as I have business at the Agency that needs my attention."

"If you wish, and with Miss Melbourg's permission,"

said Hugh, boldly, "I will relieve you of the first part of your duty. I was just going in that direction."

Edna smiled pleasantly.

"You are very kind," she said, taking his arm. "Good-by, Mr. Westland."

As they walked along she seemed in such a happy mood that he expressed astonishment.

"Pardon me, Miss Melbourg," said he, "but one would hardly suppose a night of such terror as you have just experienced, followed by a morning in jail and court, would leave you in a state of mind as jovial as that which you seem to possess."

She clung closer to his arm.

"You must think me frivolous," she replied, "but it is nevertheless true that I never carried a lighter heart than I do to-day. I am sorry—very sorry—for Nathalie, and I hope she will soon recover. But the danger to the mills is ended, and that is something to be thankful for."

He eyed her intently.

"You were frightened, of course, when Mr. Baker grasped you?"

"Oh, terribly! I did not know who it was and in my alarm I tripped and fell. Ralph's voice partially reassured me, but I was still far from comfortable. Then came the crash at the window and the awful noise of the muskets. Then Nathalie lay on the floor, and we were under arrest. At the jail we were left in the sitting-room, and not disturbed any more than was necessary. Ralph was fearfully dejected—poor fellow, he loves Nathalie so!—but I felt my spirits rising. It may have been wrong, but I could not help it. The room was very pleasant, with its open fireplace, and there were some delightful pictures on the walls."

Hugh stared at her.

"But you could not see the pictures," he said, with his usual directness.

"Ralph could describe them, couldn't he? I have fifty pictures at home that I never saw, and I think I know them all by heart. Not one of them ever pleased me as did those in the little sitting-room where they took me last night. Then the jailor's wife got out of bed and came in to talk with me. She is the sweetest little woman, with rosy cheeks and brown eyes—"

"How do you know that?" He almost shouted the question.

She laughed merrily.

"Oh, I have ways of telling. The sound of a person's voice conveys to me an idea of their personality. For instance, I know that you are blond and that your eyes are blue, and that you wear a turned-down collar and a black and white cravat. You have a full beard—I know you have—though I never touched it—"

He stopped there in the street and looked at her.

"It does not become a lady in your position," he said, "to make sport of the feelings of a man in mine."

His evident earnestness and sincerity could not wholly repress her gaiety.

"You are to see me to the hotel," she smiled, "and we must not tarry too long on this corner. I think we go to the right, do we not, and pass a large white house that sits back from the street. I have often been this way with Mollie," she explained, "and she tells me everything. Do the leaves fall as early this every year? Why, it is not far into November yet. And how clear the sky is! Not a cloud anywhere! I can tell as well as you who have sight. This glorious air could not belong to a dark and dismal day."

When they reached the hotel he reluctantly consented

to enter the parlor with her, but said he could remain only a very short time. Her happiness grated upon him, and yet he could not tell why. If a blind girl had found a pleasant hour, who could envy her its possession?

She took up her guitar, which lay where she had left it on the evening when they all sang together, and struck several chords gently. She stopped in the middle of a note, and put down the instrument.

"It was frightful in that mill!" she said. "That dark place suddenly lit up by the flash of those muskets—those gleaming barrels—"

He interrupted her with impatience.

"What can you know of flashes and gleams? I cannot understand your meaning!"

She laughed again.

"Before I was twelve I could see as well as any one. I know that guns emit flashes when they are fired, and that their polished barrels always gleam when light strikes upon them. Besides, I have had hundreds of books read to me. And I know," she continued, saucily, "that I like blue eyes, and full beards, and long, drooping blond moustaches."

He rose and took up his hat.

"You see only too well, Miss Melbourg," he said. "Your vision, blind to outward things, has penetrated the secret of my heart. It may amuse you to learn that a poor mill-worker has dared to love one who is—in the cant phrase of the world, that only looks to wealth and station—so far above him. But my self-respect will not allow me to intrude longer upon you. I have made a great mistake. Believe me, it shall not be repeated."

He was at the door when she reached his side.

"Hugh," she said, softly, "it is not *I* who am blind; it is *you*."

"*If*" he answered, satirically.

"Yes; or you would have known long ago how perfectly your love is returned."

"Miss Melbourg—"

"No," she corrected, "Edna."

"Edna, are you honest with me?"

She laid her head on his breast, and the full, blond beard touched her face at last.

"A blind girl," she said. "Think of the burden I shall be."

"I will be eyes to you. But, tell me; why were you in such spirits this morning?"

She raised her lips to his.

"Were you not with me?"

And there we will leave them.

Westland found President Stebbins at the Agency, signing the calls for another meeting of the directors. He greeted the ex-agent with formal politeness, in which there was very little cordiality.

"Let me offer you congratulations," said Westland, "that the mills are no longer in danger. It is true that, in bailing several accused persons this morning, I may seem to be opposing you, but in reality it is not so. I believe the girl the militiamen wounded is entitled to your thanks. She cut the wires, that is certain. How she knew of their location I cannot tell, and she may die with the secret on her lips. As to the others, I would stake my soul on their complete innocence."

Mr. Stebbins was reticent on that subject. He handed the director a notice of the meeting he had called, saying he hoped he would be present.

"I shall," was the reply. "If we are to save our property it is time something should be done. The loss

caused by idleness will soon be as great as if the mills were destroyed at once by explosives. I see by the morning papers that our stock sold at 263 yesterday."

The president gasped with horror.

"Then I am ruined!" he cried. "I have most of mine hypothecated at 260."

"Perhaps the falling off will only be temporary," suggested Westland. "I believe with the present rates of cotton we could start up the mills again, and earn five or six per cent. In the meantime, if you need money to meet your obligations, I shall be happy to oblige you. I have confidence in the stock. Indeed, I have left orders with my broker to buy some."

Mr. Stebbins hardly seemed to hear him.

"I am ruined," he repeated, in a faint voice.

"How many shares do you hold?"

"Three hundred. I bought considerable when the troubles began, thinking they would soon go up again. That is how I came to put my other shares in pledge. I am ruined. There is no doubt about it."

"What will you take for your holdings?"

Mr. Stebbins looked up blankly.

"Do you want them?"

"I have a client who does, if the price is right. I will give you $50 above the highest price to-day—whatever it is—for every share you own."

"I will do it," said Mr. Stebbins.

"Put it in writing."

"I will; and I will resign from the board of directors tomorrow. The Lord knows I have not had a good night's sleep since this row began."

Westland took the agreement when it was ready, and read it over.

"One thing more," he said, as he handed Mr. Stebbins

a check on account. "You will say nothing of this until after the meeting."

"Not a syllable."

A servant announced that Detective Murray had arrived, and as Westland expressed a desire to see him, he was ushered into the presence of the two directors.

"I bear sad news," he said. "Mr. Baker's body was found in the river this morning."

"His body!" cried both gentlemen at once.

"Yes. According to Mr. Melbourg's story, the agent left the mill just previous to the firing. It is supposed that he fell in the darkness, and struck his head on one of the stones that line the embankment. At any rate there is a fracture of the skull, and the doctors say he could not have survived even without the fall into the stream."

"I am very sorry," said Westland, and he looked the words he uttered. Mr. Stebbins seemed simply unable to say anything.

"Such is life," commented the detective. "To-day we are here; to-morrow—by-the-way, the man Converse and several of his most intimate associates have disappeared since daylight. They probably had a fear that the French girl would confess."

Westland shook his head, and said he could not believe her guilty.

"You would, I guess, if you saw the machinery we found in her room," replied Murray. "She had an arrangement under her floor by which she could touch off every mill in Riverfall at her pleasure. Oh, yes; we've got her down fine. I'd just as lief tell you now that she was in the room where we found this machinery at the very minute Mill No. 1 was destroyed. We have a witness who saw her leave it a short time after. She was there also on the night of the big meeting, when we

got that threatening letter giving us an nour to release our prisoners. There is no cleverer case in the history of crime. I am sorry young Melbourg has got mixed up in it, but you ought to know the facts, Mr. Westland. It is something for you to think of, whether you want to continue as bondsman in a case of this kind, when there is no longer any doubt of the guilt of the accused."

Unable to offer any reply to this explicit statement, Westland left the Agency and went to the jailer's house in search of Ellen, to whom he related all he had heard. The death of Mr. Baker impressed her greatly, and she gave utterance to the wish that he could have been in a more suitable frame of mind to meet the awful change. As to Nathalie, she only said: "Her guilt or innocence is a minor question now; we must save her life before we talk of anything else." And he stooped to kiss her, as they stood at the bedside where the young girl's soul still hovered between earth and heaven.

On the next day but one the directors met at the Agency. There were seven of them by the by-laws of the corporation, but the death of Mr. Baker reduced the number to six, and the resignation of Mr. Stebbins left but five members to choose his successor. Westland had secured the co-operation of two of the other directors, by a liberal purchase of their stock, and the names he proposed to fill the vacancies—Ellen Eastman and Hugh Mayfield—were successful.

Mr. Stearns, one of the unconsulted directors, on whom the announcement of this result fell like a shock, rose to say that he would offer his resignation. He said he did not care to act on a board with a woman. He also inquired, parenthetically, who this female director was, anyway.

"She is by far the largest owner of stock in the corpor-

ation," replied Westland, who occupied the chair. "She is the only child of the late Edwin Eastman, and will be my wife within a few weeks. Those in favor of accepting the resignation of Director Stearns will say 'Aye'; those opposed will say 'No.' It is a vote."

Ralph Melbourg was chosen to fill the vacancy The other director, Mr. Kingdon, sat speechless. Then officers of the board were chosen as follows: President, Ellen Eastman; vice-president, Philip Westland; agent, Hugh Mayfield. And the directors adjourned.

As Westland left the building Mr. Stearns met him at the door.

"I shall protest, at the stockholders' meeting, against this election," he said, in an ill temper. "I have been told that Miss Eastman is not of age."

"Oh, but she is!" said Westland. "She is twenty-one —to-day."

Then he went to see Ellen again, and told her what had been done. She tried to protest, for he had given her no intimation of his intention to use her name, but he would not hear of it.

"It is your property, and you are the one who should control it," he said. "I will be at hand to give you any information you need, and you will get along finely. The people will have more confidence in the affair if they see you at its head."

That night an immense crowd gathered about a written notice that had just been posted on the great gate of Mill No. 2, and shouts of frantic joy rent the air as they read these lines:

"The Great Central mills will be open for work next Monday morning, at the old schedule. All who wish employment are requested to notify the agent before that time. ELLEN EASTMAN, President.

"HUGH MAYFIELD, Agent."

CHAPTER XXVI.

TWO STRANGE MARRIAGES.

For several days Nathalie lay between life and death, but at last she began to rally. When she first regained consciousness it was evident that she had forgotten the events that led to her prostration, for she inquired in whose house she was and how she came to be so ill. The musket-ball had been extracted from her shoulder, and she did not at first pay a great deal of attention to her wound, as the anodynes which Dr. McNally applied kept it from giving her much pain. Her trouble was principally of the nervous order, and the good physician expressed his belief that she would be as well as ever in a few weeks, unless put back by unforeseen difficulties. He advised Ralph to be with her as much as possible, and to assume at all such times a cheerful demeanor which should give the girl no hint that he had cause for low spirits.

These directions were faithfully carried out. Ellen's place, when she was obliged to be absent, was taken by one of the mill-women whom Nathalie knew, and who proved a careful nurse. Edna came in very often, usually escorted by Hugh, and everything was done to brighten the life of the sick girl.

Ralph was much chagrined to think that his promised bride should have been concerned in the dynamite plot, for he could see no other way to explain her knowledge of the location of the wires in the mill. He loved the girl devotedly, but as he sat at her bedside he had great difficulty in following Dr. McNally's injunction to appear

cheerful. In the face of Ellen's explicit statements of her abhorrence of all violent measures, Nathalie's conduct seemed wholly without excuse. But condemn the act as he might, the actor grew very dear to him as he realized how close he had come to losing her. And the first kiss which he placed on her lips after she opened her eyes and recognized him was as warm as she could have desired.

It was, very luckily, Ellen who happened to be alone with her the day she first recollected what caused her injury. Ellen had thought the matter over a good deal in view of this very contingency.

"What makes my shoulder so lame?" asked the girl.

"It was hurt; you had a fall."

"How did it happen?" she asked, knitting her brows. "Were you there? Did you see me?"

"No, dear. But you must not forget that the doctor objects to your talking. I will tell you all about it, by and-by."

The girl lay very still for several minutes, when all at once she burst into tears.

"I—I remember!" she sobbed. "Oh, can you—ever—forgive me?"

Ellen sat down by the bedside and soothed her with kisses.

"Many pleasant things have happened since you have been sick, dear. When you are well enough to know all, you will find much reason for thankfulness."

"But I was so wicked!" she moaned. "I know that the soldiers fired at us. Was—was anyone hurt but me?"

"No."

"I am so glad! I deserve my punishment; but I meant well, Ellen, indeed I did! I thought it would

prevent everybody being turned out of doors again—and the weather had grown so cold—and—"

"There," said Ellen, soothingly, "you must not get excited. Lie still and I will tell you some of the good news. Mr. Westland has bought so much of the mill stock that he can do just as he pleases with everything. The people are sure to have their homes and, better than all, the mills are running again; yes, actually running! And he is paying the old wages, and hopes before long to increase them! He refuses to take a penny from the working-people for rent. He is going to have better schools here, and a hospital and a nursery where the little children can be cared for during the day. Oh, Nathalie, you will hardly know Riverfall when you are well enough to go out! The soldiers have gone, and Hugh is to be one of the law-makers at the State House, and every one you will meet will wear a smile!"

Nathalie's face lightened a little, but soon grew sombre again.

"No face will wear a smile for me," she said, sadly. "And I meant to help you in all that I did! I thought you would be glad—although you would not wish to know what was being done—and I never thoroughly understood you till that night. Then I was frightened and I got Edna to go with me while I cut the wires, though she had no idea what I intended to do. And when I had done it and was just going to come up the stairs, I heard her scream; and I came to where Ralph was, and Edna was talking to Mr. Baker, and Ralph scolded me. And then the soldiers broke in and fired, and I didn't know anything else."

She told her story in a jerky, hysterical way, and Ellen thought it might be as injurious to repress her as to allow her to proceed.

"Well, dear, it is all over now," she said, "and we must be thankful it is no worse."

A sudden thought entered the girl's mind.

"Have the soldiers—the officers—arrested anybody—any of the men who put the wires there?"

"No, they have not been able to ascertain who is guilty."

"Then I am willing to suffer," said Nathalie, with a sigh of intense relief. "I am willing even to die. They will ask me questions, but I shall never tell them. Those men tried to help you, as I did, and made a great mistake. I shall not tell their names; no, never!"

This reflection seemed to afford her great comfort, for she repeated the words many times, until at last they passed into a drowsy murmur and she fell asleep.

Vice-President Westland, of the Great Central Corporation, was a much more important personage than Director Westland or even Agent Westland had been. The revolution in the affairs of Riverfall impressed many persons deeply, and none more than Detective Murray, of Pinkerton's. It was not so hard a matter to convince this official that he had a very slim case against the parties arrested in Mill No. 7 on the night he and the soldiers broke into it, for he had tried in vain to secure evidence connecting them with the placing of the dynamite bombs. The most he could have proved against Nathalie was that the electrical apparatus was found beneath the floor of her room, and that she had probably cut the wires in the basement of the mill. The latter act was certainly in her favor and the former was hardly sufficient evidence of guilt, when totally unsupported by other testimony. Westland argued to Murray that the apparatus might have been put there to throw suspicion upon an innocent party. It was easy to enter such a room

with false keys, and secrete one's self in the closet during the frequent absences of the rightful tenant. Perhaps the work was accomplished during the time when the building was empty, after the tenants had been evicted.

Mr. Murray acknowledged the justice of these claims, and admitted that there was little upon which to convict the French girl unless she should confess, which was not likely. As to Ralph and Edna, he was now perfectly satisfied that their connection with the matter was honorable. So a little conversation took place with the district attorney and a judge, and the accusation against the arrested parties was formally withdrawn, to the general joy of Riverfall.

When Nathalie was well enough to be removed to Ellen's rooms she had to learn that she had been staying in the jailer's house; but they were able to say to her at the same time that all charges against her had been *nol prossed* and that she need fear no one. After a long debate on the subject, Westland, Edna and Ralph had agreed that her fault was one that should be condoned, and that the wisest thing to do was to act as though it had not only been forgiven but forgotten. With loving words and kind hands to assist her recovery the girl was soon on the road to health. But when the doctor pronounced her fit to take the air she shrank from encountering the gaze of her old associates, and they could not induce her to cross the threshold.

Ralph was in a quandary, for he knew how much she needed the outdoor atmosphere. He talked the matter over with her seriously, and at last they found a way out of the difficulty. She put on her outer garments one evening, and hid her features with a thick veil. With Ralph for her companion she stepped into a closed carriage at the door and drove a short distance. When they

returned, the carriage waited for them till Ellen had kissed the little bride and blessed her, and then the wedded couple took the late train for New York. Nathalie would not hear of a more demonstrative wedding. She looked like a very quiet girl indeed as she lay in Ralph's arms in a Pullman compartment, on her way to the city. But she was happy, nevertheless.

There was a lively time with the stockholders when the annual meeting occurred in December. Some of them talked rather angrily at Vice-President Westland who, in the absence (by his earnest advice) of President Eastman, occupied the chair. They announced their conviction that a trick had been played upon them by one of their sworn directors, and that they had been swindled—yes, sir, swindled!—out of the value of their shares. It was evidently the intention of one of the directors (they would mention no names) to so conduct the affairs of the corporation as to reduce the value of the stock still more, in order to buy out the minority stockholders at his own terms. Such conduct as that might be legal, in a certain sense, but it was clearly dishonorable and, while there appeared to be no remedy, they had at least the right to denounce it—yes, sir! and they *would* denounce it, there and elsewhere. They would let the public know what kind of people were posing as reformers and upbuilders of society!

Westland, though wincing at every blow of the lash, gave the utmost latitude to all who desired to free their minds. When the vote was taken, the old board was re-elected by a decisive majority.

The next morning Ellen read an account of the meeting in one of the New York newspapers, for the matter was deemed of sufficient public interest to take up several

columns of space. Westland came in as she was reading, and he saw that she was greatly troubled.

"What dreadful things that Mr. Morse said about you, yesterday," she remarked. "He called you almost everything despicable. I do not see how you could endure it so quietly, for the *Herald* says you made no reply."

He sat down and took her hands in his.

"The reason why I did not reply," he said, "was because I could not."

"But he said what was untrue!" she protested. "You are *not* trying to depress the value of the stock in order to buy it in. You should not have let that charge go unrefuted."

He bent his face to hers, and drank one draught of courage from her ripe lips.

"If I had spoken, Ellen, I should have had to keep on speaking. Of the one thing you mention I am at least technically innocent. But I have done and am still doing other things that are equally culpable."

She looked up in a startled way, and half drew her hand from his.

"What do you mean?"

He kissed her again.

"My dear wife—for you are so near it that I can think of you in no other way—I fear I cannot make my meaning plain to you, and I hope you will consent to leave the subject where it is."

She drew her hand quite away this time, and moved her chair a little.

"No, Philip, I cannot leave it where it is. You say you have done things that are as dishonorable as to wilfully depress the value of stock so as to purchase it for your own gain and at the loss of the owner. I must know what you mean."

Her manner sent a chill over him. He could not deny that imperiousness became her when she applied it to others, but it did not relish so well when used upon himself.

"As you will," he said, quietly. "The rate of wages we are paying, the free rents we are giving, the shorter hours we are running, are all incompatible with a dividend, unless it be a very small one. You and I and the Melbourgs may consent to sacrifice our investments. The other stockholders do not so consent, and yet we have taken away the income of their property. In one sphere of life this is what is known as a business transaction; in another it is called Robbery."

The color came and went in Ellen's cheek, and her bosom heaved rapidly.

"You would not have tolerated the dynamiters," he continued. "Hugh tells me you said you would give even him up to the police if you knew he was concerned in that affair. But you are as effectually destroying the property of the people whose money is in these mills as if you had personally applied the electric current to the explosives. Mill No. 1, lying yonder in ruins, is just as profitable to its owners to-day as any of the other six. Ellen, I have helped you to bring about this condition of affairs because I love you—not because I can persuade myself that it is right."

She stared vacantly about the room.

"They robbed us for years," she said, in a low tone, more as if addressing herself than him. "They gave us low wages and long hours, and kept for themselves unwarranted sums out of the product of our toil. Now that we have the opportunity, may we not in justice take back our own? In the twenty-two years that I and my mother worked for them they received the cost of their

shares three times over. For the love of Heaven, how much do we owe them now?"

"But, Ellen," he answered, "those who own the Great Central shares to-day are largely men and women who have bought them in recent years. Some who paid $600 and $650 a share could not sell now for $250. They are not to blame for the injustice of which you speak, and yet we make them suffer for it. To some of them the loss will mean great hardship, to others utter misery. You and I have done it. Let us not seek to evade our responsibility."

She spoke with set gaze, like a seeress.

"Why did they buy the stock?" she queried. "I will tell you. They hoped to gain an easy living for themselves through the low-priced labor of the toilers in these mills. They knew, or could have known, by what outrageous oppression the twelve per cent. dividends on the quintuply-watered stock were produced. They took a partnership in the villainy, as their ancestors did in pirate ships and slavers. If the buccaneers were caught and swung from the yard-arm—if the negroes rose and cut the throats of their captors—who spent their sympathy on the capitalistic investors? These purchasers of Riverfall stock played at a game of hazard, and they have lost. I for one shall waste no tears on them!"

He did not answer, and after a little time she went on:

"The capital of the corporation is $5,000,000. All that was ever invested here is $1,000,000. Hugh knows. He has looked it up. They built the first three mills and part of the houses out of that million, and the rest have grown from the surplus earnings. The capitalist has had a famous time. He has drawn enormous profits. The workman has merely been allowed to exist. Even

his wife and children have been compelled to labor at his side. He and they have produced this immense property. The stockholders have taken their share. It is time he had part of his!"

He waited again, but she seemed to have concluded for the present.

"I have a number of trusteeships," he said, presently, "under which I hold shares in these mills for various wards other than the Melbourgs. I took an oath in every case to protect the interests of my clients. I have asked the courts to relieve me of these responsibilities. When I give up my trusts I wish to hand to my successors, in cash, the market value of the shares on the day I was first elected agent. I find that my own property, if converted into money, will suffice for that object. Before we are married I wish this load lifted from my conscience."

Ellen looked at him strangely.

"I see," she said. "You wish to put all the culpability on my shoulders. So far as you are personally concerned, you mean to clear yourself. What you have done in my name you will leave for me to bear. It shall be so. I will buy all the stock you wish to sell, and you shall fix the price. I should like, if you please, to transact the business at once."

Her tone and manner had become so coldly distant that he took alarm.

"Ellen," he expostulated, "you are not speaking as my promised wife should speak. I—"

She stopped him with a motion of her hand.

"The certificates! I want the stock you wish to sell! I am waiting!"

He bit his lip.

"The certificates are at the Agency."

"I will go there."

Neither of them spoke till they reached the Agency, and then no more was said than was necessary to complete the transfer. When it was finished she said:

"I would like you to do another thing. I made you a promise—I said I would marry you. I wish a release."

The clock in the room ticked so loudly that he wondered what ailed it. He had half expected the demand so coldly stated, but that did not lessen the pain of it. His eyes grew hazy.

"You are released," he articulated.

"I will tell you why."

"You need not."

'Then, good-bye."

"Good-bye?" he repeated. "Are you going to leave Riverfall?"

He could feel in every fibre of his being under what a strain she was laboring as she stood there hesitating at the threshold.

"I *must* give you my reasons," she said. "I owe it both to you and myself. I could not marry a man who turned women and children out of doors in October, who cared not if they starved, who did let one of them die—"

He sprang to his feet with an exclamation.

"Ellen. *You shall not!*"

"And who," she went on, as if she had not noticed the interruption, "keeps his pity for the pampered darlings of the aristocracy lest they should soil their dainty hands, forsooth, and cease devouring the bread they steal from the mouth of honest labor! They have lost a little of their ill-gotten gains, and his tender heart is bursting with sympathy! His every pulsation is opposed to the dearest wishes of my soul; and yet he told me that he loved me!"

He wondered if he were dreaming.

"He did love you, Ellen; he loves you yet; he always will."

She burst into tears at that, and seemed so helpless that he took her in his arms, and soothed her head against his breast. When she looked up he thought she had never seemed so strange.

"If you love me, Philip, why must we part?"

"It was you who asked it, not I," he said.

"And you do love me?"

"As my life!"

"And you still wish to marry me?"

He gave undoubted assent.

"Then let it be done at once," she said, composedly, rising and drying her tears. "I have been very miserable, but I shall be better after this. If you will go for the license and a minister, I will wait here."

He stared at her as if thunderstruck.

"You are certain that you mean it?"

"Yes."

He took her again for one moment in his arms, and then departed on his errand.

In half an hour he returned with the necessary document and clergyman. Ellen had arranged her toilet at the mirror and, in response to his inquiry, said she was quite ready. Two of the servants were called in as witnesses, and the bond, or knot, or whatever expression may best suit the reader, was securely tied.

"Where shall we go?" he asked her, when they were again alone.

"Nathalie went to New York, did she not? I should like to go there."

He went to tell Hugh and Edna what had occurred, and he did not wonder at their amazement. They were

hardly more astonished than he. Then he packed his things, and the evening train bore him and his bride to the metropolis.

A little past midnight the sound of hysterical laughter awoke the echoes in the Hotel Victoria, and a call at the annunciator summoned a bell-boy to Mr. Westland's apartments.

"Send a messenger to Dr. Odlin with all speed," was the order given.

Then the loud laugh broke out again, and there was heard the sound of a woman's voice, raised to an unusual pitch:

"I am worth three millions! I can buy anything I want! I am going to live in a palace, and have many servants! Ha, ha! Ha, ha!"

When the physician arrived he administered a quieting potion, which soon had its intended effect. Then he talked a long time with Westland about his patient, and what her history had been. When he left he said he would call again in the morning, and added, in response to the husband's earnest questions:

"I don't like the looks of this; no, upon my word, I don't. But we shall see; we shall see."

CHAPTER XXVII.

EDNA MAKES A REVELATION.

Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Melbourg passed their second honeymoon in the same cosy suite of apartments in which they had passed the latter part of their first. Installed in that place, the bride experienced a greater content

ment than she had felt for a long time. It is doubtless true that a bride ought to be contented anywhere, but the fact remains that there are discontented brides as well as contented ones. Nathalie was very glad to be Ralph's wife; she was pleased to get away from the town of Riverfall, where so much had occurred to cause her pain; but she could not forget her one great Sin, that had so nearly cost her her life. Ralph never alluded to it—Ellen had impressed the necessity too strongly on his mind for that—but it was ever present in her thoughts Those days, so longed for, when her husband should clasp her in his loving arms, were embittered by the constant reproaches of Memory.

One morning Ralph received a note from Philip Westland, asking him to come at once to the Victoria. It was the second day after Ellen's attack, and Ralph was very much astonished when he learned of her condition. He had seen the announcement of the marriage in one of the newspapers, and experienced a natural surprise that it should have occurred so quietly that not even intimate friends like himself were invited. Westland met him in one of the parlors, and gave nim sufficient explanations. Ellen, he said, was now tractable, but still flighty, and required constant care. The tiresome months of heavy responsibility and distress of mind had bore their legitimate fruit. She would require a long rest and the best medical skill. All this Westland told Ralph with tears in his eyes, and the young man evinced ready sympathy.

"I wish you would move down to the block where I live," he said. "There is a furnished suite next to mine, in which your wife would be much better off than here. Nathalie would be delighted to see her. They think the world of each other, and women understand women better than men do."

Westland had a momentary struggle. He did not like Nathalie. He disliked to think of "his Ellen" associating with her on terms of intimacy. But Ralph's words set him to thinking. He wanted to do everything to improve the chances of his wife's recovery. He realized that she had a deep regard for Mrs. Melbourg. The Victoria was clearly no place for an invalid with her disorder. All of these things passed through his mind in much less time than it takes to relate them; and then he told Ralph he would see what his wife said, and act accordingly.

Mrs. Westland sat in her sitting-room, clad in a bright morning-gown, and with her hair becomingly arranged, when the gentlemen entered. A maid who had been hastily engaged had attended to the details of her mistress' toilet, and disappeared discreetly.

"Ellen," said Westland, approaching, "here is Ralph; Mr. Melbourg, you know; Nathalie's husband."

Mrs. Westland rose to greet Ralph, and gave him her hand with every sign of pleasure. He saw nothing that resembled insanity in the calm gaze that met his, and his wonder increased.

"I am very glad to see you," she said. "I want you to notice that there is nothing the matter with me. My husband has had a physician here several times, who insists that I am not well, and that I require medicine, rest and care. Now, I appeal to you, did you ever see a person who looked healthier or more rational?"

Ralph thought he never had, but he used caution for all that.

"I think you are recovering rapidly," he said.

"Recovering?" she echoed. "Recovering from *what*? I am sure I have not been ill. I have just eaten a good breakfast. My temperature appears normal. Perhaps

you think there is something the matter with my mind Put me to any test you please. Your name is Ralph Melbourg. You are married to Miss Nathalie LaVerre. This is the Hotel Victoria. I am Mrs. Philip Westland. What ails me? I really would like to know."

There was nothing in this to excite suspicion. Ralph said as much in the look that he gave Westland, who sat a little to the rear of his wife, where she could not see his expression. The husband nodded, and intimated by a gesture that he would prove his case.

"My wife is the principal owner in the Riverfall mills, you know," he said.

Ellen lifted her head and her eyes brightened.

"Yes. I have an income like a princess! I am worth three millions! When we leave here I shall have many servants to attend me. *Three millions!* Do you know what those words mean—*three millions?*"

The chord was struck at last. Ellen had never spoken like that. The mental disturbance was evident. Westland's face grew whiter as he proceeded.

"My wife's tenants have been given free rent since the mills opened."

"And why?" asked Ellen, sharply. "Why should they not pay rent as well as others? They have had their hours of labor reduced, too! Instead of going to work at half-past six in the morning they come idling along at seven. How can I compete with other manufacturers if placed at such a disadvantage? Those spinners and weavers want everything! But they shall not have it! I must make my dividend!"

Not at all like the Marchioness were these expressions; not in the least like the gentle lady who had slept in the officers' tent on Riverfall Common.

"I came to ask you to visit Nathalie," he said, to di-

vert her attention. "We live in Eleventh street, in a pleasant apartment house, and would be delighted to have you and your husband pass a time with us. Nathalie has missed you sadly."

The set look vanished from Mrs. Westland's face, and she became herself again

"Shall we go, Philip?" she asked. "I think I should like it very much."

He gladly assented and, after a little further conversation, called the new maid and left her with his wife, while he went with Ralph to make the necessary arrangements. The suite was promptly engaged, and that same afternoon he left the marble entrance of the Victoria with his wife on his arm. When he escorted her to a carriage that was in waiting, she assumed the air of an empress, and inspected the equipage at a distance with arrogance. Perceiving a speck of dust on the cushion she declined to enter the vehicle until it was removed. When she was at last seated, she remarked, in a tone evidently meant for the by-standers, that she would soon have a turn-out of her own, beside which this would be a very ordinary affair.

Nathalie welcomed her with open arms, and the two girls—for such they still were, marriage or no marriage—seemed very happy to be again with each other. The two suites had been thrown together, and the families were to be practically one for the present. The gentlemen left their wives together, and Ellen took Nathalie into her confidence.

"I have had some strange dreams," she said, "and because I cried out in one of them, my husband insists that I am ill and need a physician. I dreamed the strangest things of you. I thought—the idea!—that you and I were mill girls in Riverfall, and had to work like

the rest, and live in the poorest lodgings And I thought you came to me one day, and confessed that you had been living with a lover, and were not married at all! Oh, dear! I don't know what I didn't dream! It was just like a nightmare. I thought there was a strike, and that we slept in a tent, and—" She paused a moment. "Sometimes it seems so real I almost think it true. But I know I am very rich, and so it could not have been; no, it—could—not—have—been!"

She pressed her hand to her forehead, and seemed glad to assure herself that the obnoxious vision was a deceit.

"I do not think I could endure to be poor," she went on. "Of course, those who are born so grow up in it, and get used to the condition; but it would kill me, I am sure. To work, work, work, early and late; to sleep in barely furnished rooms; to eat the food they have to eat —I would rather die. And yet I dreamed that I was one of them!"

She shuddered visibly at the recollection.

At Riverfall things went on as usual. Agent Mayfield became deservedly popular with his employes, and he began to make figures that showed the possibility of a dividend, even at the scale of wages he was paying. A new intelligence ran through all the work in the Great Central mills. The purchasing was done by a new superintendent, a Mr. Byrne, who was an expert in such matters. The quality of the product was improved and the waste lessened. All the men and women (there were no children at work now) did their best to make the business successful.

With Ellen domiciled at the Melbourgs', it was easy for Westland to run down occasionally in the morning, and spend a few hours looking after his work, catching the afternoon train again in time to reach New York at

night. Being acting-president, he had fully as much to do in the city as in the factory village, and he soon found that Hugh was equal to any emergency in the position that he held. The affairs of the corporation began to assume a prosperous appearance.

Edna remained with Mollie at the Riverfall House, where Mayfield saw her daily. She was very happy in the love of this good, honest man, and she put no obstacles in his way when he proposed an early marriage.

"Since Philip and Ralph have preceded us," he said to her one day, "we seem very lonely standing here on the deserted shore. When shall we join them?"

She answered that she would leave it all to him; and he replied that the very quickest hour possible would be much too far away to suit his wishes.

"A blind girl," she whispered, clinging to him. "How could you have fallen in love with me?"

"I only know I did," he answered, "and I think it was the first time I saw you, too; that day I was sent by the committee to ascertain if there was anything less hard than flint in the heart of a mill-agent. Now, what about the wedding?"

It was soon decided that, as Nathalie and Ellen had been married without display, they could do no better than follow the example. Early in December they took the vows before one of the Riverfall ministers, and that same night they found themselves in one of the quiet hotels of the metropolis.

"My wife!" exclaimed Mayfield, tenderly, when the door was closed that shut out all the world and all the gods but Hymen. "My wife! There is no happiness on earth equal to calling you by that name."

She hesitated a moment to let him clasp her in his

arms, though she knew well they were outstretched to receive her.

"You have faith in me," she said, in a low tone. "You do not think I would deceive you?"

"Never!" he cried. "I could swear it!"

"But—Hugh—I have done so."

He stared at her face, on which rested a smile and could make nothing of her confession.

"You think me what I am not, Hugh. It is time you knew the truth."

It was a cruel test, but he came out unscathed.

"Tell me anything you please, my wife," he said. "I know you to be pure and good. Whatever else you have to communicate, I will hear."

She put her arms about his neck and drew the blond beard to her cheek.

"Can you guess nothing?"

"Nothing," he answered. "I am not good at riddles. Tell me."

"Well—" She drew a long breath and hugged him closer. "I—can—*see!*"

For the briefest moment he thought she had caught Ellen's malady, but a look at her placid face drove the suspicion away.

"You can *see?*" he repeated, wonderingly. "You have not been blind at all?"

"Oh, yes, I have. When I was twelve years old my sight failed. The doctors have always feared to operate on my eyes, though they agreed that natural means might accomplish my restoration in time From that age until a few weeks ago I could not tell light from darkness. But that night in the mill, when the soldiers fired, I saw the flash of their muskets and the gleam of the polished barrels, as they were aimed toward us. The fright, the

tension, the strain and the sudden jar did it. An oculist who has been down to visit me says I shall soon see as well as any one. At present I can distinguish objects quite clearly, and you cannot imagine how happy it makes me!'

He shared her joy to the utmost.

"And this is what made you seem so gay that morning," he said, "when I wanted to scold you for hard-heartedness."

"Yes," she laughed. "I had seen the pictures in the jailor's sitting-room—I never saw such beautiful ones, though they probably cost very little—and I knew the jailor's wife had brown eyes, and that you had a blond beard. I could tell that the sky was fair, and that the leaves were gone from the trees. I had become quite reconciled to blindness, but it is such a blessing to see!"

He strained her to his heart.

"The future will be brighter for us both, my Edna," he said. "There is now but one cloud hanging over us—Ellen's trouble."

"Ah, poor Ellen!" she sighed. "We must go to visit her to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A JOURNEY AND RETURN.

Dr. Odlin advised that Mrs. Westland be humored in every desire that was not positively unreasonable, and her husband and friends acted accordingly. She developed a great love for fine clothing and jewelry, and very handsome indeed she looked when the modistes

had done their best. She asked to be taken constantly to theatres and operas, with which she was much delighted. She had never till now seen anything of the kind, and the brilliant stage pictures gave her the same kind of pleasure that a child has. In the large dry goods stores and millinery establishments her face soon became familiar, and the clerks at Tiffany's learned that whatever she happened to fancy was sure to be taken. She showed taste in her purchases, and her mental condition might never have been suspected but for her favorite phrases:

"I am worth three million dollars, and can buy anything I please! Do you know what is meant by three millions?"

Westland was thankful for one thing. She liked Nathalie's company so well that she did not immediately demand to be taken to the "palace" of which she never tired of talking. There was not a residence in the city that would have equalled her description of the one she intended to have as soon as her visit with her friends was over. Indeed, it would have been difficult to produce anywhere the terrestrial paradises she used to describe, and they varied in their composition with each change in her mood. One day the buildings were to be of brown stone; another of marble; and again of onyx. The sun was to shine on the grounds perpetually, out of a cloudless sky. Birds were to sing without ceasing in the ever-green trees. Servants were to be ready to respond to every wish as soon as it was made known. Gayly-caparisoned steeds were to draw carriages truly royal in design, with coachmen and footmen in gorgeous liveries. And at the end she never failed to say something like this:

"I own six immense mills at Riverfall, which have two

thousand people in them. The corporation has only paid twelve per cent.; it must pay twenty. The employes now work but ten hours; they must work eleven. I shall want a great deal of money."

She used to say to Nathalie that when she went to her "palace" she should go with her, and share in all its splendors. But when Mr. and Mrs. Mayfield called she touched their hands mincingly, and assumed an air of dignity.

"I think you were formerly an employe in my mills," she said to Hugh. "I am very glad you have prospered, and I congratulate you on your marriage; but of course there is such a difference in our station that you cannot expect me to treat you as equals. You are very worthy people, I have no doubt. I wish you good-morning."

As Ellen left the room tears filled Edna's eyes.

"Even the restoration of my sight hardly compensates for this sad event," she said to the others. "To think she could use such words to Hugh—it seems incredible."

Mayfield looked serenely content.

"We cannot weigh the words of one whose mind is so distraught," he said. "When she becomes herself again she will treat me in the old way. What advice does the doctor give?" he added, turning to Westland.

"That we must exercise patience, and not cross her any more than is necessary. He believes her phantasies will have their run and vanish as they came. God grant it may be so!"

Nathalie was very shy when she met Edna. The sight of her brought back too vividly that awful night in the mill, when she took her helpless friend into such mortal peril. But Edna had many words of comfort.

"Do you ever think how much I owe you? I might

have been blind to my dying day had it not been for that adventure. The occulists say that nothing but the combination of fright, darkness, terrible noise and gun-flashes would have been likely to give me back my vision. It is you that I must thank—under Heaven—that I can look on the blessed sunlight and the dear face of my husband."

Nathalie began to cry.

"I am very glad if that great mistake of mine has brought good to any one," she sobbed. "I meant it all so well, and all at once I saw how wrong it was. And you are so kind to forgive me! I thought I should have to go to prison for the rest of my life, or perhaps be hanged! But nobody says a cross word to me, and sometimes it seems as if that were harder to bear than punishment."

Mrs. Mayfield comforted her with assurances that her friends appreciated the unselfishness of her motives, and said it was time she resumed her old cheerfulness.

"No one has suffered by your connection with that plot," she said. "If you had not consented to operate the battery some one else would have done it, and perhaps every mill in the town would have been destroyed. You did a noble act when you took that midnight journey to cut the wires. For myself, I have received too much benefit from it to scold you, and you were the only person hurt. I think you a little heroine, and I shall love you as long as I live!"

Mayfield made his wedding trip a short one, as there were many things to be done before January, when he would have to devote a large part of each day to his new duties at the State House. Edna was content to go wherever he went, for her life was bound up in her husband. They established themselves at the Agency, for the

house belonged by custom to the agent, and their lives glided on thenceforth with scarcely a ripple on its placid stream. There was much to do—much for her as well as for him. The mill-girls began to confide in her, somewhat as they had done in the Marchioness. She became the custodian of their secrets—the confidant of their joys and sorrows. She taught the mothers many inexpensive ways to brighten their homes. She gave some of them much-needed lessons in cleanliness. She saw personally that the children were dressed suitably to attend the village schools—that their little feet were dry-shod and their fingers encased in warm mittens. She threw rum bottles out of windows, and read the fathers of several families a lecture they did not soon forget. And it was so pleasant to do all this, so delightful to use her newly-regained sight in uplifting those about her.

"They will forget Ellen in their admiration for you, little wife," said Hugh, one evening, as she was telling him of her day's experience.

"No, they will never do that," she answered. "There will be but one Ellen in Riverfall. They ask about her every day, and the tears come into their eyes when I tell them she is still unrecovered. They are learning to love me—and I am so glad I can help them—but I cannot fill Ellen's place. Heaven speed the day when she can resume it!"

So the weeks wore away, and in the latter part of January Dr. Odlin gave it as his opinion that Ellen required a change of scene, and that a southern trip would probably prove beneficial. At Westland's earnest request Mr. and Mrs. Melbourg agreed to join him in a journey to Florida. He did not like to take such a responsibility upon himself as to remove his wife not only from the

sights to which she had become accustomed but from the faces also. The party made the trip by easy stages, stopping several days at Washington, Savannah and other points en route, and reached Jacksonville in about a fortnight.

For some days Ellen seemed quite content in the semi-tropical atmosphere. She walked and rode a good deal, and sat on the great piazza of the hotel until late at night, talking with a buoyancy of spirits that gave no indication of her malady. Then they noticed that she gradually grew sombre, responding reluctantly when spoken to, and preferring to sit by herself whenever the opportunity offered. She no longer cared to go to ride, or to hear music or conversation. She became melancholy to a marked degree. When asked if anything was the matter she always responded in the negative, but her actions disputed the assertion. Her friends became alarmed, and would not leave her for one minute entirely alone.

One morning, at the breakfast table, she astonished them with this question:

"Why does that colored man always wait on *us*? We never wait on *him*."

Westland explained, as well as he could, that the man was employed by the proprietor of the hotel to do this work, and received pay for it.

"But he is always busy, while we do nothing," she persisted. "How can it be right that some people should always be served and that others should always serve them? I feel that it is wrong—that I am assisting at an injustice; and I want that man to sit at this table and let me wait on him as he has waited on me."

He persuaded her to finish her breakfast, which was being taken in the public room, saying that he would arrange the matter later. Then he explained the situ-

ation to the chief steward, who readily gave him a small dining-room on the next floor, to which another breakfast was sent. The part he was to play was shown to the darky, who smiled broadly when a handsome tip was placed in his palm.

"Golly!" he exclaimed. "I nebber seed nothin' like this afo'. Niggers waited on by white folks! Dat am mighty queer, now, ain't it?"

When he was seated at the table and warned against any further manifestation of levity, Mrs. Westland was sent for. She poured the man's coffee, and handed him the edibles in the order required, with unmoved countenance, standing behind his chair when not otherwise engaged, as she had seen him do. It was only with a great effort that Westland could keep back the tears at the pathetic spectacle, for he was in no mood to see its numorous features. When the colored brother had breakfasted and departed, she came to her husband and sat on his knee.

"Philip dear, why does that man wear poor clothes, when you wear fine ones? He labors all day, while you rest. I cannot understand why this should be."

Then he told her about property and its privileges, as kindly and thoughtfully as if she were a five-years child and learning her first lesson. He said those who labored were paid stipulated sums, which they could do with as they pleased. Some persons spent their money as fast as they received it, and were consequently always compelled to labor on account of their improvidence. Others put part of their wages into investments, and thus became wealthy. If they saved more than they used, it descended to their children, as her father's had done.

She listened intently to every word.

"And some people can compel other people to do all

their work? And I am one of them?" she asked, as he concluded.

"Yes."

"But that cannot be right, Philip. No, I am sure of it. We have led a pleasant life at this hotel, but it has made much labor for others. While we have rested on the piazzas, they have been in the hot kitchens, preparing our meals. When we have returned from rides, they have had our horses to groom and our carriage to wash. It is all wrong. I want you to take me where I can do my share. I cannot be contented here another day."

It was a change; there could be no doubt of that; but he did not know yet whether to be glad or sorry.

"What can my little wife do?" he asked, tenderly. "When ladies are married, it is for their husbands to furnish their support, and that is what I wish to do for you. My business is at New York and Riverfall, and if you desire we will go back there where I can attend to it. You will make me a loving companion, and I will gladly work for both."

She kissed him on the lips.

"Oh, let me help!" she said. "I want very much to be of use. I feel like a thief when I eat only what others have earned, and wear only what others have produced. Let me help you, Philip, and I shall be happy again."

The next day the party started to return north. It was raining when they took the carriage at the hotel entrance, and Ellen's sympathy for the driver who had to sit out in the shower nearly made them lose the train. The positive assertion of the man himself that he preferred to be there was needed to assure her, but she talked all the way of the poor fellow who was getting wet to oblige people who never did anything to oblige him. On the train her thoughts flew to the engineer

and fireman, who must sit up all night to watch over the safety of passengers who never sat up and watched over anyone. Why was it thus? she asked Westland, over and over, and his answers. though ingenious, never quite satisfied her. It was surely wrong, she said, that those who did nothing should have better treatment than those who toiled without ceasing.

When they took the New York steamer at Savannah, Ellen's sympathies broke out afresh. Nothing could prevent her wrapping herself up and patrolling the decks in the keen air of the sea, going from officer to officer and saying how sorry she was that they had to endure so much that she and others might ride in comfort and safety. The facts regarding her mental condition soon became known and she was treated by everybody with the utmost politeness. Before night she made her way down to the furnace room, and her deepest feelings were aroused as she saw the men at work in the super-heated air of the place.

One of the stokers, a good-natured chap, was resting a little way from his furnace when she addressed him.

"Your work is very hard, is it not, sir?"

He looked at the handsome lady and saw that the question was put in earnest.

"Pretty hard, mum," he answered.

"And very hot?"

"Pretty hot, mum."

"And very dirty?" She looked at him intently. "Are you black or white, sir?"

"Wall," he chuckled, as if the idea amused him, "I'm black when I'm at work, an' I'm pretty near white when I'm washed up, though I never gits it *all* off. It do stick close, this coal dust; yes, indeed, it do."

She opened her purse.

"Would you mind my offering you a piece of money sir? I know I am troubling you with my questions."

"Not a bit,' he answered, touching his cap with one hand and holding out the other for the gratuity. "Ye're very kind, mum, an' I'm obleeged to ye. Ask me any thin' ye like."

She saw that several of the other men were coming sheepishly nearer, evidently wondering what the conversation was about.

"Where do you sleep?"

"In thar." He indicated the direction. "In a bunk. It's comf'table 'nough. I don't find no fault with *that*."

"You get plenty to eat?"

"Oh, yes, mum. It ain't sirline steak, nor yet plum puddin', but it's good. A man in this work is allus blessed with a appetite, mum."

"How long do you have to work each day?"

He stopped to think.

"Thar's two sets of us. Between us, we keeps it up all the time. Thar's my pardner, now; him as is openin' th' furnace door. We uses lots of coal, an' we keeps at it. We're either workin' or eatin' or sleepin', when we're at sea, *all* the time. Yes, that's about it, mum."

She waited a little.

"They must pay you very high wages to do such hard, confining labor?"

He laughed, respectfully though.

"Wall, it's not so very high, mum. Twenty an' board."

"Twenty—dollars?"

"Yes, mum."

"A—a day?"

"Well, no, mum," said the man, much amused "Twenty a month is our wages."

She looked to see if he were jesting.

"Twenty dollars a month! Less than a dollar a day!"

"Yes, mum, an' plenty of men arter the job if we don't want it. 'Scuse me, mum, but it's my turn at the fire."

She watched him open the great door and throw shovelful after shovelful of coal into the yawning hell. Another of the stokers came to take the seat he had vacated, and she opened her purse again with the same result.

"Has that man a—a family?" she asked, indicating the stoker with whom she had just been talking.

"What, Bob, mum? Oh, yes, he's got a wife an' three children in New York."

"What supports them?"

"Wall, I guess Bob gives 'em most all he earns. Then the woman, she takes in sewing; an' one o' the gals, I b'lieve, tends in a store. *They're* all right, mum. He's a good, steady feller, is Bob. But *some* o' these stokers —wall, the whiskey gets most of it when *they're* paid off! An' *their* wives an' children—!"

The stoker intimated that their lot was not one to be envied, and Ellen mentally agreed with him. She went back to the cabin, where she found her husband, a little perturbed at her long absence. She told him where she had been and what she had learned.

"It is the same everywhere," she said, sadly. "The people who do the hardest and most disagreeable work get the smallest wages. This is not right. It cannot be. If the fault is in the laws, we must get them altered."

The thought that the laws could be changed pleased her, and she dwelt upon it for some time. In the course of their talk he referred to Riverfall, and she asked him many questions about that place, saying she wanted to

go there as quickly as possible after reaching New York. If she owned as much of the mill-stock as her husband said, she surely could do something to help the poor operatives. He gave her the required promise, and she grew radiant with joy.

On reaching the city they went to Ralph's apartments, where they remained for a day, in order to allow Westland time to communicate with Mayfield. He had arranged a little plan which, when revealed to Dr. Odlin, met that gentleman's hearty endorsement. It was Saturday evening, about five o'clock, when the party that had left Jacksonville alighted at the Riverfall station. The streets in the vicinity were filled with people, who set up a shout of delight when they saw the visitors. One of them, too impetuous to be restrained, called out, "Three cheers for Ellen!" which were given with a will.

Mrs. Westland paused wonderingly on the platform, as she perceived the demonstration.

"Who are these people," she asked, "and why do they cheer for me?"

"They are the workers in the mills," said her husband, "who have assembled to welcome you nome."

She looked at him with a puzzled air.

"Home?" she repeated.

"Yes; home to Riverfall; to the village where Ellen was born, where she went to school, where she tended a loom in the mill. Home to Riverfall, where she led the great strike, and where she met Philip Westland. Do you not remember?"

She was silent for a moment; but Hugh, who now came through the crowd, won a pleased glance of recognition.

"Ellen," he said, taking her hand.

"Hugh; dear, good, faithful Hugh!"

It was enough. Westland spoke to the assemblage.

"My friends, it gives great pleasure to Mrs. Westland and myself to look into your faces once more. We hope to be for some time among you and, as my wife is somewhat tired from her long journey, we must ask you to excuse us for the present."

There were three cheers more, and then the crowd fell back and let them pass. Mr. and Mrs. Melbourg went to the Agency with Hugh, and Westland walked with his wife slowly down the familiar streets to the house where Ellen had lived. They ascended the stairs and entered her sitting-room. Nothing was changed. It was the same room in every respect that she had left three months before.

He waited for her to speak, for on her first words depended everything. A mellow light filled her eyes as she took in, one after another, the familiar objects. The plants had been cared for, the room swept and dusted. Even the canaries were singing in their cages.

"It is my HOME!" she said, drawing a long breath. "The dream is over. I am Ellen, the mill-girl of Riverfall."

He waited still, overjoyed to see how calm she was.

"I thought," she continued, "that I was an heiress; that I had much money. I am very glad it is not true. I shall go back to work to-morrow."

He ventured to tell her that to-morrow would be Sunday.

"Will it?" she said, in great surprise. "I thought by the crowd in the streets that to-day must be a holiday. Are not the mills running?"

He said the mills shut down at four o'clock on Saturdays now, instead of at six, as formerly.

"Ah!" she replied. "The new agent must be a very kind man. But, perhaps," she added, thoughtfully, "they begin enough earlier each morning to make up the time."

"No," he said. "They begin later. The gates open at seven and close at half-past five."

She seemed much pleased, and sat silently with her hands clasped over one knee for several minutes.

Supper was sent to them from the Riverfall House, and they partook of it together. He did not wish to subject her to further excitement on that evening, and she very willingly embraced his suggestion that they remain indoors.

"I would like to have you stay as long as you can," she said. "I am sure it is not yet very late."

He smiled, and took his marriage certificate from his pocket.

"Read."

She read it wonderingly, and her eyes dilated.

"What month is this?" she asked.

"February."

"Thirteen weeks!" she mused. "And I thought it part of the dream!"

"There is the ring on your finger."

"Yes." She turned the hue of a carnation. "But, I am not sure. I do not remember it. No, I cannot let you remain."

He gazed at her tenderly.

"And you have slept next to my heart every night for three months and more!"

She looked much distressed.

"I will tell you," he said, presently; "we will be married again."

She brightened at the suggestion.

"Dear Philip, I am sure I did not know what I was doing when I married you before; if, as you believe, I ever did so. I am equally sure I know what I am doing now, and if you wish I will repeat the vows. But give me a few days to get ready."

"No," he said, clasping her in his arms, "I will not consent to even a temporary divorce. I insist that it shall be to-night."

An hour later the same clergyman who had officiated on the previous occasion bade them join hands and repeat after him a formula. It was in Ellen's sitting-room, and two of the lodgers in adjoining rooms came in by request to act as witnesses.

"You no longer doubt that you are my wife?" he said, when they were alone again.

"No, Philip," she answered. "And with that knowledge there rolls away a vast cloud that has enveloped me. I seem to see everything clearly. Oh, my husband, how good you have been to me through the dark days that have passed away, let us hope—forever!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

LOOKING BACKWARD.

It was Sunday morning in Riverfall. The day was fair—the fairest anybody there ever remembered seeing in a February. The church-bells were ringing a call to the faithful—at least, the sexton meant it so. But the music of the metal resolved itself in spite of them into

these words: "*Ellen—is—home—again! Ellen—is—home again!*"

A little after ten a sensation ran through the town. Mr. and Mrs. Westland were on the street! People ran to windows and stared around the edges of curtains. Small boys tumbled in and out of alleys, in their mad anxiety to see without attracting attention to themselves. The many passers on the sidewalks bowed politely or touched their hats, and gave the returned travelers much more room than they needed.

"They are going to church!" ran the whisper through the village. "And to the French church, too!" was soon added, to the general astonishment.

Yes, they were going to the French church, and they had not turned Catholics, either. When Westland asked his bride, that morning, whether she wished to attend divine worship, she thought a moment, and then said there was but one clergyman in Riverfall whom she would care to hear.

"There was only one who gave us shelter when we were houseless," she said. "It would put me in an irreligious frame of mind to go elsewhere, but I would really like to hear good Father Laroche."

The usher recognized them with a smile and escorted them to a central pew, in which they found, to their surprise, that Ralph and Nathalie were already seated. Ellen did not understand the French language, and the meaning of the sermon was consequently lost to her, but she felt a satisfaction in being there that well repaid her for going. The clergyman noticed that the special visitors to his church received more attention than was given to his discourse; but he was content. When the services were ended, the quartette in Westland's pew walked together to the Agency.

"When we get things arranged," said Ellen, "there are several things that I wish to do. I wish to build a very large Protestant church here that will hold a great number of people, and in which some devout man shall preach Christianity with no sectarian bias. I want a place where any tired soul may find spiritual or physical succor within its walls. Then I would also like to erect a hall, spacious and attractive, that should always be open to the work-people for social and recreative purposes. Have I money enough to do these things, Philip?"

Her husband answered in the affirmative, and volunteered the additional statement that he cordially approved of the plan.

Dinner was taken with the Mayfields, and the reunited friends were very happy together.

"It is delightful to be with you again," Ellen said, as they lingered over their coffee. "Especially under such auspices, with the future so bright before us. I learn that the mills are all running with shorter hours, and are even making money. Philip says he hopes to raise the wages soon, besides the free rents the people are now receiving. We shall use the profits for a hospital, an evening school and a library, all of which we need very much. My husband agrees with me in these things. Oh, he is a very good man indeed—for a capitalist!"

She laughed brightly as she pronounced the epithet, but Westland grew sober.

"I doubt if there is much more of the 'capitalist' left in me than there is in my wife," he remarked. "I have been learning some pretty hard lessons during the past half-year."

"For instance?" said Ellen, gaily.

"I believe," he replied, "that what is called wealth should never be allowed to accumulate in private hands,

beyond a given extent; that the natural increase of property in a country should be the heritage of all the people thereof; that the State should absorb the greater part of private fortunes on the death of the reputed owners; that no child should be poorly fed, meanly clothed, or deprived of an education merely because its father is not an able financier; and that there can be no such thing as over-production of the necessaries of life while a single human being is cold or hungry."

Ellen clapped her hands joyfully.

"You have learned the alphabet!" she cried. "The rest will come easy now, never fear!"

He put his hand on her arm.

"We who sit at this table have been enabled—by one form or another of chicanery—to claim the ownership of three-fourths of Riverfall. We must own the rest as soon as we can get hold of it." Then, as they looked blankly at him, he added: "When we get possession of all the stock of the Great Central Corporation we can give it back to its rightful owners—the people who have made it by their labor in the mills."

Ellen seemed to hang on his words.

"Give it back?" she repeated.

"Yes. We can establish here a socialistic community in which each resident will share equally in the work and the benefits which are derived therefrom. The responsibility of the ownership of millions is too large for any one person, or dozen persons. I would like to see it put on ten thousand shoulders."

His wife threw her arms around his neck before them all.

"The idea is a magnficent one!" cried Ralph Melbourg, with enthusiasm. "What say you, Edna, shall we join with them?"

Mrs. Mayfield looked at her cousin. Her sight was now completely restored, and she bore no trace of having ever been blind.

"You forget, my dear Ralph," she said, "that I am penniless. When I married, I forfeited my father's estate, and it became yours."

Westland endorsed the statement, and said that Edna had drawn nothing from the Melbourg property since her wedding-day.

"But I won't touch it!" exclaimed Ralph, indignantly. "I'm not so mean as that! I shall at once make it over to you again."

"If you do," she answered, "I shall certainly embrace Philip's proposal, so it will amount to the same thing."

"No, it won't," said Ralph, "for it will then be your own gift, as it ought to be. We're in for it, Phil. Count in the Melbourg stock, and buy up the rest as soon as possible."

Westland replied that he should certainly do so, and thought that, in the depressed state of the stock, he could make some good bargains, too. He believed he could secure the most of it at $200 or under.

"Wouldn't that be robbing the poor owners?" said Ellen, archly. "Some of them paid higher."

"I am on a quest for stolen goods," he answered, "and I shall give no larger bounty to the brigands who hold it than I find necessary."

Ellen, who had not taken her arms from his neck, pressed her cheek to his.

"Forgive me for a slanderer," she said. "There is no trace of the capitalist left in you."

"Perhaps there is—a little," he responded. "I shall not advise you to surrender every dollar you own, even in this righteous cause, nor shall I give up all of mine.

While we live under the present social system—which even we at this table cannot wholly overturn at our mere caprice—a certain amount of thoughtfulness for ourselves is needed. In a country that is lower than the tides, dikes are necessary between the people and the sea. Some day the government will build all these dikes, but at present each must take thought for his own safety. We must, therefore, save back a little money for emergencies."

His wife smiled into his eyes.

"I shall not need very much, for I can always find a loom to tend," she said.

"Not always," he corrected, "in these days of strikes and lockouts. Though I think the Riverfall community will never refuse work to its founder, if it comes to that."

The last time I visited Riverfall, though I had heard much, I was astonished at the change in its appearance. Rows of tasty cottages, with attractive lawns, have taken the place of the dismal corporation barracks. The streets are very clean and there are sidewalks everywhere. There are fountains in the public squares. Many new buildings have been erected, among them a church, a hall and three mills. The mills are run on eight-hour time, and the prices paid are larger than those at similar establishments elsewhere. In a long walk that I took about the village I did not see a single thing that denoted the grinding poverty so common in most mill-towns.

"We owes it all to Mr. an' Mrs. Westland, sir," said an aged man, who hobbled out of an easy chair on one of the porches to give me the information. "They used to call the wife 'Ellen' an' I've heard that she likes the

name even now better'n any other. They live in one o' these little cottages, like the rest of us, though she had three million dollars left to her. I tell you it was a big day when she made it all over to the community. Now everybody that's able to work has plenty of everything, an' old men like me gets an allowance; 'put on the retired list,' they calls it."

I asked him if Ellen had any children.

"Well, no, sir, not edzackly; but"—his voice dropped mysteriously—"she's workin' on some little garments, an' I'm thinkin'—"

He pointed out the house to me, and I looked up at the sky that bent over the humble roof. Not a cloud nor the sign of one could be seen in all the blue expanse

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